

# Laughter as Feminist Intervention in Grete Stern's 'Sueños'

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Grete Stern, *Los sueños de situaciones ridículas* (1949).

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter One: Photomontage.....	13
Chapter Two: The <i>Sueños</i> .....	27
2.1: The Phallus.....	38
2.2: Monsters.....	49
2.3: Confinement.....	58
Chapter Three: Feminism and Comedic Effect .....	68
Conclusion .....	82
Bibliography .....	85
Appendix.....	88

Abstract: The subject of this thesis is the *Sueños* series: photomontages completed between the years of 1948-1951 in Buenos Aires by the artist Grete Stern. This series, originally published in the popular magazine *Idilio*, illustrates dreams submitted by readers for the column ‘El psicoanálisis te ayudará’. These images constitute a feminist intervention into mainstream representations of women in visual culture and invite this magazine’s young female readership to reimagine standards of conventional femininity through laughter. The feminist agenda behind this series is defined through humor and comedic effect. In the space of this thesis, I explore how this work represents a significant contribution to feminist Surrealism and prompts reflection on an essential link between humor, politics, and visual art.

## Introduction

Today, Grete Stern is considered one of Argentina’s most important and influential photographers. She is credited with bringing modernist photography to the country, largely due to the *Sueños*. Throughout her career as a visual artist, Stern addressed a range of subjects from the materialistic femininity of Weimar Germany to the poverty of Argentina’s Chaco region. As a young woman, Stern lived in Berlin and studied under Bauhaus photographer Walter Peterhans. At this point, she also co-owned and operated the advertising photography studio *ringl+pit* with friend and collaborator Ellen Auerbach. In 1933, Stern fled the rise of National Socialism in Germany. In 1936, she settled in Argentina where she lived and worked until her death in 1999.<sup>1</sup>

The scope of the work Stern produced over her lifetime testifies to her ability to see beyond the frame of the national, cultural, and social spaces she occupied. As a migrant, feminist, and artist, Stern simultaneously embraced and distanced herself from the worlds she inhabited. In this way, her work reflects the unique position of an

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Mandelbaum, *Ringl and Pit* (Geovision, 1995) [online film streaming]

integrated observer puzzling over encountered cultural norms and habits. Stern's photomontages tend to deconstruct the materialistic consumerism of femininity propagated by mainstream visual and advertising culture. The *Sueños* series, as well as the images produced by the ringl+pit studio, possess a sense of humor enabled by the medium of photomontage that challenge conventional terms of femininity by rendering the traditional unfamiliar.

The photomontages that are the subject of this thesis, the *Sueños* series, were produced between the years of 1948 and 1951 in Buenos Aires for the column 'El psicoanálisis te ayudará' (later changed to 'le ayudará'), published in the popular magazine *Idilio*. The column, a sort of "consultorio sentimental" [sentimental consultancy],<sup>2</sup> involved the collaboration between three individuals: Grete Stern, Gino Germani and Enrique Butelman. It consisted of a dream interpretation by fictional American psychoanalyst Professor Richard Rest (a character designed by Butelman and Germani) and a photomontage that illustrated the dream in question. A reader who sought deeper insight into her psyche would fill out a questionnaire and send a description of her dream to the magazine, then receive her analysis in the form of Rest's published response. Stern chose to complete the illustrations of these dreams through the medium of photomontage.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Enrique Butelaman interviewed by Analía Roffo in 'Enrique Butelman, o ese destino maldito de amar los libros' in *Tiempo Argentino* (9/10/1983), quoted in Luis Priamo 'Notas sobre los *Sueños* de Grete Stern' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Stern "era quien propuso utilizar fotomontajes para ilustrar los sueños...Además de disfrutar este tipo de trabajo, ella era evidentemente consciente de las posibilidades que ofrecía el género para representar el carácter excéntrico de la realidad onírica" (was the one who proposed using photomontages to illustrate the dreams... Beyond just enjoying this type of work, she was clearly aware of the possibilities the medium offered for representing the eccentric character of oneiric reality) Luis Priamo, 'Notas sobre los *Sueños* de

The first chapter of this dissertation will discuss the political and historical circumstances surrounding Stern's early career in Berlin and formation as an artist. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how her exposure to Dadaist photomontage and the Bauhaus contributed to the parody and social critique of the *Sueños* series. The second (and most extensive) chapter describes the political context of this column's publication in early-Peronist Argentina. In this chapter, I also discuss and analyze specific images from the series. Though the series is comprised of 150 photomontages in total, this chapter refers to only nine of them. These images were selected for their embodiment of larger patterns that are evident in the series as a whole, namely: sex and desire, monstrosity, and confinement. The third and final chapter shows how the concept of collective laughter is essential to the feminist function of the *Sueños*.

In recent years, the images that make up the *Sueños* series have received a fair amount of critical and scholarly attention in Argentina and abroad.<sup>4</sup> Most experts on Stern's work treat this series as a critical reflection of gender norms and the social institutions of early-Peronist Argentina. Maud Lavin<sup>5</sup>, Luis Priamo<sup>6</sup>, Paula Bertúa<sup>7</sup>, and Hugo Vezzetti<sup>8</sup> have all contributed significantly to the elaboration of the socio-political impact of this series, both in the moment of its production and in the cultural history of Argentine visual culture in general. Lavin has written extensively on the advertising

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Grete Stern' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Stern's photomontages have been exhibited in solo shows at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires (2013) and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Maud Lavin, *Clean New World: Culture, Politics and Graphic Design* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Luis Priamo, 'Notas sobre los Sueños de Grete Stern' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Paula Bertúa, 'Sueños de *Idilio*: Los fotomontajes surrealistas de Grete Stern', *Boletín de Estético*, 6 (2008).

<sup>8</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, 'El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*' in *Los sueños de Grete Stern: Serie completa* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003).

images Stern produced in collaboration with Ellen Auerbach. Luis Priamo has analyzed the reception of this series and the collaboration between the three actors who together produced this column (Germani, Butelman and Stern). Vezzetti's piece on this column's method of dream interpretation reveals the disciplinary and moralizing societal standards behind Rest's analyses. Finally, Paula Bertúa's assertion that Stern's photomontages come out of a need to create a language for women's dreams<sup>9</sup> has been essential to my understanding of the political potential in this series.

This thesis contributes to existent considerations of Stern's work by identifying a concrete feminist agenda in the comedic effect of this series. The content of this popular magazine reinforced a status quo that defined standards of appearance, behavior, and lifestyle for women. Stern's *Sueños* invited women to reflect upon (and laugh at) the superficial and disciplinary terms of conventional femininity as produced and circulated in popular visual culture. This laughter is in part directed how female-ness is formed and performed at the level of visual culture, and asserts the possibility for an alternative to conventional presentations or performances of gender. Stern's images reveal the limited options available to women in the performance femininity under a patriarchal and consumerist visual culture, representing this performance with parody and subversion. Simply, the purpose of this thesis is to show how this series functions as an intervention into patriarchal visual culture through comedy, enabled by the medium of photomontage.

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<sup>9</sup> "Podemos aprehender que el verdadero principio de motivación semiótica que subyace a los fotomontajes de Grete Stern es la necesidad de crear un lenguaje para los sueños femeninos." Paula Bertúa, 'Los sueños de Idilio', *Boletín de estetico*, 6 (2008), p. 15.

The language I use to make this argument is directly informed by Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and the concept of the male gaze.<sup>10</sup>

Butler's theory of performativity and Stern's *Sueños* are linked in their approach to the understanding of 'woman' as a set of learned behaviors and circumstances. Stern's portrayal of the dreamers in these images reveals a female subject who is constructed through and confined by the repetition of specific embodied acts that define conventional femininity. By representing the roles and functions that define femininity and femaleness, Stern's montages are deeply engaged with how the performance of gender is defined according to social expectation, calling attention to how gender is constructed and reinforced by visual and societal codes. In 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', Judith Butler argues, "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo."<sup>11</sup> The author expands upon Simone de Beauvoir's claim that 'woman' is a historical idea, not a natural fact. Indeed, the establishment and embodiment of gender norms take place through the repetition of learned acts:

To be female is...a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, one becomes a woman by repeatedly submitting the body to established behavioral standards and expectations. The repeated performance of 'woman'

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<sup>10</sup> See: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) and Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* 16.3 (1975), pp. 6-18.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519-531.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 522.

takes place through deliberate acts that reinforce gender's seemingly seamless and 'natural' quality.

Butler emphasizes the importance of repetition in the performance of gender and the role of 'woman' in particular. She states, "reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence."<sup>13</sup> Through repetition, the material and behavioral codes that signify gender are taken to be natural. These codes are fashioned according to various expectations, ingrained through convention and habitually reinforced since birth. Disrupting or intervening in these repeated, sedimented expectations must take place through the process of repeated intervention. The photomontages of the *Sueños* series portray 'woman' as facsimile by repeating the uniform 'codes' of femininity communicated and reinforced through mainstream culture, in this case the popular magazine. By portraying a caricature of the female subject engaged in or entrapped by the performance of femininity, this series suggests the possibility for reimagining existing as a female subject.

Another essential theoretical anchor to my argument is the concept of the male gaze. This concept is hugely important in areas from art history and film criticism to commercial advertising and feminist psychoanalysis. John Berger, in his text *Ways of Seeing*, succinctly describes this phenomenon, stating, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at [...] The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and particularly an object of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 524

vision: a sight”<sup>14</sup> Berger goes on to illustrate this relation of sight and power between women and men in images from 16<sup>th</sup> century painting *Susanna and the Elders* by Tintoretto to contemporary advertisements for underwear.

According to Laura Mulvey’s discussion in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, the male gaze is constituted through desire, which structures all relations of sight. Scopophilia, as it is defined in Freud’s ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’, refers to this particular type of desire and pleasure involved in looking.<sup>15</sup> Scopophilia is associated with “taking other people as objects, [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.” Mulvey applies this concept to the regulation of women’s behavior and appearance by visual culture, purportedly a product of the patriarchal unconscious. “Woman as representation signifies castration”, and the male gaze is concerned with “inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat.” When woman is converted into a visual subject encountered on-screen, she becomes “(passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man.”<sup>16</sup> This is the fundamental dynamic present in the visualization of the woman “as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look.”<sup>17</sup> In this reading, the male gaze is built on the act of conditioning the female spectacle for consumption. As Mulvey states, “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote

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<sup>14</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), eBook.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 835

<sup>17</sup> Berger, p. 47



to-be-looked-at-ness.”<sup>18</sup> This to-be-looked-at-ness is evident in the tradition of the nude in painting and sculpture, and its commercial potential is capitalized on in mainstream advertising images. The widespread influence of the ‘male gaze’ is reflected in the standards through which the female subject is made to appear and remain in sight, only to be recognized as ‘female’ when presented in accordance with these terms.

In their discussion of female contributions to photography, Ana M. Muñoz-Muñoz and María Barbaño González-Moreno declare that across the range of applications and uses of photography (as a work of art, a science or means of historical documentation), women have been largely absent or excluded. “Desde la Venus de Willendorf, interpretada como símbolo de la fertilidad, hasta llegara las imágenes de medios de comunicación actuales, en las que la figura femenina aparece una y otra vez cargada de connotaciones sexuales, el cuerpo femenino ha sido utilizado como icono atendiendo a diversos intereses (religiosos, comerciales...)” [From the Venus of Willendorf, interpreted as a symbol of fertility, to the commercial images of today, in which the female figure appears time and time again saturated by sexual connotation, the female body has been used as an icon in service of a range of interests (religious, commercial, etc.)]<sup>19</sup>. Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, woman’s position in visual art was almost exclusively as an object of consumption, fashioned according to the standards set by patriarchal culture. As the authors note, “el poder sobre la circulación de la identidad femenina lo ha tenido siempre el hombre, creando y manipulando esa imagen de acuerdo con el imaginario masculino del momento” [the power over the circulation and identity of

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<sup>18</sup> Mulvey, p. 843

<sup>19</sup> Ana M. Muñoz-Muñoz and María Barbaño González-Moreno ‘La mujer como objeto (modelo) y sujeto (fotografía) en la fotografía’ in *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*, 26.1. (2013), pp. 39-54.

women has always been held by men, creating and manipulation this image according to the masculine imagination of the moment].<sup>20</sup> Because “todo es imagen, y toda imagen es susceptible de ser definida, comercializada y puesta en venta al ciudadano, convertido en poco más que consumidor” [Everything is image, and every image is susceptible to being defined, commercialized, and sold to the citizen, converted into little more than consumer], standards of ‘feminine’ appearance and behavior are manipulated and regulated by a visual culture that is influenced by commercial and patriarchal interests. The *Sueños* represent an important example of a feminist response to the male gaze as it plays out in mainstream visual culture. By presenting strange or abstract scenes of women in conflict, Stern’s photomontages call attention to visual conventions of femininity and reconfigure the possibilities for imagining how women might appear in popular visual culture. The next chapter explores how and why the medium of photomontage is suited to this feminist intervention into patriarchal and commercial visual culture.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

## Chapter One: Photomontage

The peculiar advantage of photo-montage lies in the fact that everything which has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic appearance. We are still looking first at *things* and only afterwards at symbols.

John Berger, 'The Political Uses of Photo-montage'<sup>21</sup>

This chapter will discuss the historical and political legacy of the technique of photomontage. Given the medium's resistance to a determined definition, this is not a simple or straightforward task. By distinguishing between the photomontage and the photograph, however, a concrete definition can emerge, specifically in regards to the latter's claims to alleged transparency. The history of photomontage as a political tool in modernist avant-garde movements will be discussed, specifically in relation to Stern's commercial work in Berlin in the early 1930s, which possesses a similar satirical tone to that of the *Sueños* series. By examining distinct approaches to photographic manipulation and the legacy of photomontage as a political tool, this chapter will address the following questions: What is political about the disassembling and reassembling of an image? To what extent does the *Sueños* series serve as a means of 'political education'?<sup>22</sup>

In attempting to define the photomontage, we must first address and understand the photograph's so-called truth-value. For decades, critics and philosophers of photography have fixated on the allegedly true, objective, or indisputable dimensions of

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<sup>21</sup> John Berger, *The Look of Things* (London, Penguin Books, 1972), p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> John Berger, "The Political Uses of Photo-montage" in *Selected Essays of John Berger* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 185

the photograph. Works such as Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*<sup>23</sup>, Susan Sontag's *On Photography*<sup>24</sup>, and Ulrich Baer's *Spectral Evidence*<sup>25</sup> consider how the photograph's truth-value informs its political, social, and affective force. The camera is credited with carrying an essential and undeniable truth; representing the image of an event or moment that has, indisputably, taken place. However, in Mia Fineman's book *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* the author illustrates that "photography's inherent realism has always been bolstered by techniques of artifice and illusion."<sup>26</sup> The authority of the photograph, or the belief that it constitutes a true and objective representation is in part due to its 'indexical'<sup>27</sup> quality, or the understanding of a photograph as "an imprint on a light-sensitive surface, [that] has direct physical relationship with the thing it represents."<sup>28</sup> Despite this indexical quality, Fineman points out that the supposed truth-value of photography is a product of various techniques of fabrication. As she articulates, "If photographs appear accurate, authoritative representations of the world, it is because, on some level, we *need* to believe them."<sup>29</sup> The belief in the photograph's transparency points to a need or desire to believe in the validity of the information presented in the image. When depicting an event or state of

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<sup>23</sup> "The camera repeats mechanically what could never be repeated existentially." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth." Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> "The single, indisputable truth about any photograph is not its meaning or veracity but its testimony about time. 'This once was,' each photograph says, 'and you are viewing it from a time in which the photographed object or person may no longer exist.'" Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Mia Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> As Fineman points out, the term 'indexical' that describes the relationship between photography and 'truth' is borrowed from the semiotic theory of the American linguist Charles Sanders Peirce. Fineman, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Fineman, p. 18

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 19

affairs that the viewer wants to believe are true, there is a presumption that the photograph does so transparently.

As Fineman illustrates, the history of photographic fabrication is as long as the history of photography itself. The political and social ramifications of this faith in the photographic image are clear when considering how public opinion is informed by photographic ‘evidence’. In her chapter ‘Politics and Persuasion’, Fineman articulates that “the faking of photographs was a key tactic” in authoritarian regimes’ falsification of the past and control over the present.<sup>30</sup> She refers to the uses of manipulated photography under National Socialism, the Cultural Revolution in China and McCarthyism to illustrate this point. From Eugene Appert’s 1871 series *Crimes de la Commune* to Stalinist propaganda images, Fineman demonstrates how “a manipulated photograph...could endow even the most outlandish political fiction with an air of factual authenticity.”<sup>31</sup> Fineman’s book posits the history of photography as a case of myth masquerading as fact. Photomontage, meanwhile, is invested in displaying the illusion of this masquerade.

The photograph, when subtly but significantly altered, can inspire unquestioning belief in the material it represents. The photomontage, on the other hand, works against this unquestioning acceptance by emphasizing the process of fabrication in the construction of the image. What is the relationship between the photograph’s presumed veracity and the material it represents? When subject to division and fragmentation, the coherence of the image (and the viewer’s desire to believe in the image) is overtly questioned. The technique of montage in cinema, like photomontage, demands that the viewer discern meaning from a disassembled whole.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 89

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 89

In Sergei Eisenstein's 1929 essay "Beyond the Shot", the Soviet film director and theorist proposes a theory of montage based on the effects of conflict and collision. What characterizes the montage, according to Eisenstein, is "Collision. Conflict between two neighboring fragments. Conflict."<sup>32</sup> In bringing together dissimilar fragments of a whole, the viewer is made to assemble meaning by negotiating the relationship between these elements. As Eisenstein explains, "from the juxtaposition of these monstrous incongruities we reassemble the disintegrated phenomena into a single whole but from our own perspective, in the light of our own orientation towards the phenomenon."<sup>33</sup> Because montage interrupts the process of perceiving an image as whole, it forces the viewer to confront the constructed nature of the image and face the desire that leads him or her to believe in the resulting political and/or aesthetic material as coherent, true, or real.

In Dawn Ades' book *Photomontage*, the author describes the historical circumstances that gave rise to this technique's emergence. The artistic and political applications of photomontage became especially significant just after the end of the First World War, around 1916, when the Berlin Dadaists began to introduce photographs and fragments of newsprint or magazine clippings into their work.<sup>34</sup> At this point, the technique implied an emphasis on "the comic arrangement of photographs" and "the subversive potential of the medium."<sup>35</sup> As Ades argues, the disruption of the alleged truth-claim of the photograph was a decisive factor in the development of photomontage,

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<sup>32</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot" in *S.M. Eisenstein: Selected Works, Volume I* (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), p. 141.

<sup>33</sup> Eisenstein, p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Ades, p. 12

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 24

given that “the photograph has a special and privileged place in relation to reality, and is also susceptible to being manipulated to re-organize or dis-organize that reality.”<sup>36</sup> With the growing circulation of print media, an image of ‘reality’ as reflected in mainstream visual culture was absorbed into and critiqued in the space of the photomontage.

In Grete Stern’s lecture ‘Apuntes sobre fotomontaje’, delivered in 1967 at the opening of an exhibition of her work in the Foto Club Argentina in Buenos Aires, she discusses the limits of photography and describes how the photomontage tests the viewer’s expectations of coherent meaning. Stern asserts, “discutir si la fotografía es un arte o no me parece un malgastar el tiempo, porque el terreno de las definiciones es infinito, trillado y convertido, y ninguna definición podrá negar la importancia que tiene la fotografía en la vida social, política y expresiva del hombre de hoy” [to discuss whether or not photography is a fine art seems like a waste of time because the sphere of definition is infinite, worn-out and constantly changing. No definition can deny the significance of photography to the social, political, and expressive life of man today].<sup>37</sup> Later in her speech, Stern describes the photomontage’s ability to represent the uncanny by reproducing a truth-like relationship between dissimilar objects or constructing unlikely scenarios. “La perspectiva distorcionada siempre dará el efecto de lo inseguro, de lo inverosímil...una perspectiva correcta es imprescindible para otros casos...pues aquí la perspectiva exacta aumenta gráficamente la veracidad” [A distorted perspective will always give an effect of the uncertain or the implausible [...] a true perspective is essential [...] because a realistic perspective graphically supports the veracity of an

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 66

<sup>37</sup> Grete Stern, ‘Apuntes sobre el fotomontaje’ in *Los sueños de Grete Stern: Serie completa*, p. 30

image].<sup>38</sup> By adjusting the scale of discrete pieces of a photomontage, the degree to which the image can be read as mimicking or completely disregarding ‘truth’ is affected. The truth-value of the photomontage is undermined to varying degrees depending on how its content is reconfigured. As this passage illustrates, distorting or reproducing the conventions of perspective can frame the content of a photomontage as more or less true.

Though her career launched many years after the height of the Dadaist movement in Berlin, Stern was clearly aware of a political legacy of photomontage that foregrounded her work. In this speech, she refers to the significance of this technique in Dadaist and Surrealist movements in Berlin. She states, “no fueron los fotógrafos los primeros que hicieron de este juego con las fotografías ... sino los artistas plásticos que integraban los movimientos Dadá y Surrealista” [photographers were not the first to play this game [the disassembling and reassembling of images] with photographs...but fine artists who were involved in the Dadaist and Surrealist movements].<sup>39</sup> Stern suggests that the process of undermining the truth-value of an image as a potentially political act, describing the Berlin Dadaists’ engagement with the ‘game’ of photomontage, stating, “en Berlín el dadaísmo tenía un tono más político” [in Berlin, Dadaism had a more political tone]. George Grosz, John Heartfield, Man Ray, and André Breton are all mentioned by name in this speech.<sup>40</sup> In his essay, ‘The Political Uses of Photo-montage’, John Berger elaborates upon the political function of this form, focusing on the work of John Heartfield, credited with having invented the photomontage.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 31

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 31



Berger discusses how the symbols or objects reproduced in the photomontage can be manipulated to express a political position regarding their own veracity or sordidness, arguing that the practice of photomontage works to “demystify things.”<sup>41</sup> Heartfield, born Helmut Herzefelde,<sup>42</sup> is credited with having ‘invented’ the technique of photomontage with George Grosz around 1916. Between 1927 and 1937 Heartfield gained international recognition for the political impact of his photomontage posters and cartoons. During this time, he worked as a graphic propagandist for the German communist press, producing cartoons and posters in resistance to the rise of Nazism. According to Berger, in Heartfield’s works there is the “sense of everything having been soiled...Apart from what they depict, [Heartfield’s] images themselves are sordid: or, more precisely, they express disgust at their own sordidness.”<sup>43</sup> This suggestion that Heartfield’s images possess an ability to express disgust in regards to their own content is significant for understanding photomontage as an inherently political act. Another pioneer of photomontage, Hanna Höch, also created images that take a critical position in relation to their content.

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<sup>41</sup> John Berger, ‘The Political Uses of Photo-montage’, p. 184

<sup>42</sup> “He adopted the English name Heartfield in defiance of German wartime patriotism.” John Berger, ‘The Political Uses of Photo-montage’, p. 183

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Location 4126.



Figure 2: John Heartfield, *Adolf, The Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk* (1932).

The work of Hanna Höch critiques gender relations and consumerism in general, and thus can be seen to foreground much of Stern's work in photomontage. Höch describes photomontage as a technique that arose out of the expansion of uses for photography: "the wide range of uses for photographs led to a new form of compressed utterance. Photomontage [is] the process of remounting, cutting up, sticking down, activating—that is to say, alienating" the subject of a photograph.<sup>44</sup> Höch's understanding of the photomontage as a 'compressed utterance' reflects the dynamic exchange or dialogue, staged between disparate parts, that can take place within the image. In one of

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<sup>44</sup> Hanna Höch, 'On Collage' in *Hanna Höch* (Prestel/ White Chapel Gallery: 2014), p. 16

her most famous works, entitled *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (*Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*), from 1919, images of a number of female celebrities from the worlds of art and theater are featured centrally. The piece critiques the patriarchy of the Weimar Republic that is obscured by the liberation promised by this 'Cultural Epoch'. The title and the composition of this photomontage suggest a new world order of women's empowerment that can only take place through the act of slicing or cutting, reflecting the processes of producing photomontage.



Figure 3: Hannah Höch, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife...* (1919)

Like Höch's representations of the gender dynamics of Weimar Germany, Stern's early advertising photomontages incorporated and reacted to the consumerist culture of this context. In 1929, Grete Stern, together with Ellen Auerbach, opened the Foto Studio ringl+pit in Berlin after studying photomontage under Walter Peterhans for two years. Between the years of 1930 and 1933, the two produced (with limited commercial success) avant-garde advertisements for lotions and tonics. These were typically cut-up assemblages of objects, mannequins, and silhouettes and simultaneously addressed the masquerade of femininity and critiqued the consumer culture of Weimar Germany.<sup>45</sup>

These advertising images, ultimately designed to sell a product, reveal a parody of the female subject consumed by her own emancipation and/or emancipated only through commercial consumption. The commercial photomontages of the ringl+pit studio typically include a female figure placed centrally in the frame. She is represented either indulging in or stifled by some material or commercial conditions. In many images, this takes the form of her complete mechanization or of her representation as a human-manikin hybrid. The clothing, makeup, and 'liberated' behavior that the female subject of these images assumes is overstated and portrays the alienation embedded in the consumer culture this style came to stand for.

In her book *Clean New World*, Maud Lavin points out how, in the German advertising culture in which the ringl + pit studio functioned, women were typically

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<sup>45</sup> In 1933, *ringl+pit* won first prize for the poster advertising *Komol* hair treatment at the *Deuxième Exposition Internationale de la Photographie et du Cinéma* in Brussels. The photomontage *Komol* (Figure 5) reveals an erasure of the female consumer ('she' is represented by a paper cut-out silhouette) and an emphasis on the artifice of this beauty ritual.

represented as empowered either only through the consumption of commodity objects or through their representation as commodity objects themselves.

Advertising images were complex representations of the anxieties and desires concerning new identities for women...In these ads, women were addressed as 'empowered' buyers, but often only insofar as their power was limited to purchasing products that would enable them to construct themselves—through make-up, shampoo, powder—as exchangeable objects, commodities.<sup>46</sup>

The advertising images of ringl + pit poke fun at this conflation of woman and commodity, calling into question the division between the female consumer who buys while being sold as a product herself. Within this system, images circulated of the woman-commodity as an “idealized art product” and the consumers who are overcome with “reverence for the formal beauty of machine-made objects.”<sup>47</sup> The images that ringl + pit produced, though only marginally commercially successful, were applauded in artistic and avant-garde circles at the time for their ironic take on femininity and consumerism.

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<sup>46</sup> Maud Lavin, p. 51

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 53



Figure 4: ringl+pit, *Petrole Hahn* (1931-33)

In an advertisement for Petrole Hahn hair shampoo (Fig. 4), a smiling manikin wears a wig and a nightgown that once belonged to Auerbach's mother. Despite the manikin's artificial appearance, a real human hand holds the bottle of shampoo for sale. In this confusion of human and manikin, the image conflates the figures of woman and automaton and points to the masquerade of femininity and the treatment of women as objects. With an awareness of advertising standards of the time, the comedic effect of this image comes through: it is a parody of the typical commercial aesthetic that presented sleek, strong or impressive representations of the 'modern' object. In this image, these standards are undermined by the manikin's nightgown, literally leftover from a previous generation. The woman-manikin hybrid, wearing a wide grin and dressed in a nostalgic

nightgown can be read as a reaction to the highly stylized aesthetic of German commercial visual culture and its presentation of femininity of the time.<sup>48</sup>

In the work of ringl + pit “there is a focus on various types of feminine masquerade” that are reflected upon critically through humor and nostalgia.<sup>49</sup> As Lavin’s chapter illustrates, the work that Stern and Auerbach produced during these years directly addresses the masks of femininity propagated and reinforced by German commercial visual culture. Their use of manikins, attention to material surfaces and fabrics, and ironic take on the conflation of female consumer-as-commodity channel a critical reflection of feminist art that engages with questions of artifice. The photomontages produced by ringl + pit and the *Sueños* series both exemplify how the male gaze can be resisted or interrupted through visual means. In both cases, the technique of the photomontage works to fragment and thus reveal the fallacy of conventional standards of femininity.

The work of Heartfield, Höch and Stern exemplifies how photomontage can be a tool of ‘political education’, as described by John Berger.<sup>50</sup> As Berger points out, in a photomontage “appearances themselves are suddenly showing us how they deceive us.”<sup>51</sup> In this way, the photomontage possesses the ability to critically reflect upon its own content. Because “the natural continuities within which these things normally exist have been broken, and because they have now been arranged to transmit an unexpected message, we are made conscious of the arbitrariness of their continuous normal

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 57

<sup>49</sup> Lavin, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> “In Heartfield’s hands the technique [of photomontage] becomes a subtle but vivid means of political education, and more precisely of Marxist education.” John Berger, ‘The Political Uses of Photomontage’ in *Selected Essays of John Berger* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), page 185

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 186

message.”<sup>52</sup> While the photograph constructs an impression of coherence and truth, the photomontage fractures this coherence and reveals the extent to which we as viewers are susceptible to believing the material as true or valid.

The technique of photomontage in the modernist avant-garde sense of the word can be understood as invested in debunking this supposed truth-value of the photograph: while photographs are manipulated in order to express a supposed ‘truth’ of their subject, photomontage makes this process of manipulation visible, alienating discreet parts of an image. Photomontage stages a resistance to apparatuses or systems that structure the viewer’s expectations. By separating ‘things’ from their visual context, the force of symbolic meaning is isolated and the viewer is confronted with the ‘need’ to believe in the alleged ‘truths’ communicated by the image. By isolating and alienating materialistic symbols, the photomontage exposes the behaviors and appearances that inform this performance as fabricated. In the following chapter, images from the *Sueños* series will be specifically analyzed for various symbols and codes of femininity represented through a type of playful parody.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 185



## Chapter Two: The *Sueños*

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Argentina saw rapid economic growth and an influx of rural populations into city centers, especially Buenos Aires.<sup>53</sup> Published in 1948, ‘El psicoanálisis te ayudará’ and Stern’s *Sueños* appeared two years after Juan Domingo Perón’s election to president. The first section of this chapter will focus on the visual culture in the country at this pivotal moment and discuss the shifting gender politics ushered in by Peronism. This analysis ultimately seeks to show how the *Sueños* reflect the codes and symbols of idealized femininity that proliferated in Peronist propaganda and commercial visual culture. In the second section of this chapter, I will analyze nine images from the *Sueños* series. In three sub-sections, this analysis will address the presence of phallic symbols, monstrosity, and confinement in the *Sueños* series.

At the moment of this column’s publication, changes in social mobility and economic distribution inspired profound transformation in the urban centers of Argentina, especially in regards to the position of women in society.<sup>54</sup> In their introduction to *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America*, the authors<sup>55</sup> note that during the first half of the twentieth century in Latin America “gender systems showed signs of flux and contradiction; the categories of masculine and feminine began to be redefined within the space of the city.”<sup>56</sup> Beginning in the 1940s, and increasing with Evita’s rise in popularity from 1946, standards of beauty and appearance shifted towards an image of the

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<sup>53</sup> Joel Horowitz ‘Populism and its Legacies in Argentina’ in *Populism in Latin America* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Paula Bertúa, ‘Relatos modernos: centramientos y descentramientos de género’, *Mora 16* (2010), pp. 7-33.

<sup>55</sup> Emilie Bergmann, Janet Greenberg, Gwen Kirkpatrick, et al., *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Bertúa, ‘Relatos modernos’, *Mora 16* (2010), p. 4

professional, happy, active and educated woman; the ‘liberation’ represented in these images of modernity defined new standards of beauty and feminine performance.<sup>57</sup> Images of women engaged in both domestic and professional activities proliferated: “En afiches e ilustraciones de diarios y revistas proliferaban imágenes convencionales que representaban a las mujeres asistiendo a los hijos o al marido, como asalariadas en el mundo industrial moderno, o haciendo gala de sus recientes derechos adquiridos en materia civil y política en calidad de votantes” [in posters and illustrations in newspapers and magazines, images proliferated that showed conventional representations of women taking care of their children, their husband, or as high-powered professionals in the modern, industrialized world, taking advantage of their newly-won civil and political rights].<sup>58</sup> Juan Perón’s campaign for presidency relied heavily on these representations of highly stylized and idealized femininity and the modern approach to gender politics his election promised. A picture of modern womanhood was embodied by the public figure of his wife, Eva Perón.

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<sup>57</sup> See also: “The Modernization of Femininity: Argentina 1916-1926” in *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America*.

<sup>58</sup> Bertúa, p. 9.



Figure 6: Eva Perón (1947).

Perón's rise to power was, in large part, due to his and Evita's campaigning for women's political participation. In her essay 'Eva Perón y la organización política de las mujeres' Carolina Barry notes, "la incorporación de mujeres a la política formaba parte, también, de las estrategias de ampliación de las bases de sustentación política del peronismo y de inclusión de sectores antes ausentes" [the incorporation of women into politics constituted one of [Perón's] strategies to increase support for Peronism by involving social sectors that were previously absent] from politics.<sup>59</sup> Peronist efforts to

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<sup>59</sup> Carolina Barry, 'Eva Perón y la organización política de las mujeres' (Buenos Aires: 2011), p. 1.

include women in politics culminated in two significant outcomes in the late 1940s: the passing of the Ley del Sufragio Femenino (Law of Women's Suffrage) in 1947 and the establishment of the Partido Peronista Femenino (Women's Peronist Party or PPF) in 1949. The PPF was headed by Evita, and was created as an exclusively female political organization directed at garnering female support for Perón's election.<sup>60</sup> Before her death in 1952, Evita came to embody an ideal of femininity and political participation that defined the role of women in Argentine society, namely a type of social martyrdom as well as a protector of the sanctity of family.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to her political efforts, Evita was a symbol for the scope of roles women could occupy in Peronist Argentina. The PPF and the Fundación Eva Perón offered courses in reading, writing, and dictation for women who worked in offices, as well as supplementary lessons in cooking, sewing, and baking.<sup>62</sup> Barry notes, "más allá de la actividad estrictamente política [...] el eje de la acción estaba destinado a cubrir los intereses considerados culturalmente propios de las mujeres" [beyond strictly political action...the crux of [the PPF]'s activities was to provide for interests considered specifically directed at women].<sup>63</sup> By providing institutions and structures that encouraged women's engagement with traditionally 'feminine' activities, Evita forged a model for a conservative femininity that reformed the role of women in Argentine society from exclusively domestic caretakers to participants in political and social causes. This new model of femininity involved a dual-emphasis placed on familial/domestic

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<sup>60</sup> Barry, p. 2

<sup>61</sup> "La actividad en las unidades básicas femeninas estaba dirigida tanto a las mujeres como a sus hijos menores, e indirectamente, a la familia en su conjunto." Barry, p. 19

<sup>62</sup> Barry, p. 20

<sup>63</sup> Barry, p. 19

obligation and political/social participation. Women in Peronist Argentina aspired to embody the political ambition, professional capacity, and maternal selflessness symbolized by the figure of Evita Perón. Though under Perón and the influence of Evita women entered the job market and enjoyed political participation for the first time in Argentina's history, an emphasis on traditional duties and the obligations of home and family remained central to female identity, especially in images that proliferated in mainstream visual culture.

Under Perón, the integrity of the Nation was seen as dependent on the preservation of the family, and thus on the woman fulfilling her function as wife and mother. Through visual culture and social programs, the State promoted women's domestic duties as an essential element in her public or professional work. A close relationship between the picture of domestic tranquility and the security of the Peronist state was established in "las escenas domésticas, que describían espacios y momentos de ocio o de la vida cotidiana de familias en actividades recreativas...instantáneas habituales que pretendían dar cuenta de un bienestar y calidad de vida alcanzados gracias a las bondades y concesiones del Estado benefactor" [domestic scenes, or the representation of leisure time for quotidian families engaged in recreational activities... habitual moments expected to testify to the well-being and a quality of life attained thanks to the goodness and concessions given by the benefactor State].<sup>64</sup> In communicating that satisfaction and wellbeing were provided and supported by one's allegiance to the State, the domestic sphere is emphasized and an image of a happy family is put forth.

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<sup>64</sup> Bertúa, 'Relatos modernos', *Mora 16* (2010), p. 9

In Hugo Vezzetti's essay, 'El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*', he addresses how the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis reflected a larger trend in Argentine society at this moment, that of the protection of a moral and social purity of the family and thus, the Nation. At this time, the concept of moral hygiene constituted a "construcción pública y colectiva; en ese discurso, el tema de la mujer y el niño aparecían como términos de un mismo problema: la familia higiénica (particularmente las funciones maternas) como sostén de la salud de la especie y aun de la Nación" [a public and collective construct; within this discourse, the subjects of the woman and child reflect aspects of the same subject: the hygienic family (particularly relating to the function of the mother) as essential for the health of the species and the Nation].<sup>65</sup> In the *Sueños* series, this picture of traditional femininity and domesticity is evident "en la red de vínculos y dependencias que todavía envuelven la vida de esas mujeres: siempre hay un marido, un novio o un padre en el centro del conflicto. Y los consejos sobre la vida amorosa se atienen a una moral sexual" [in the network of attachments and dependencies that surround the life of these women: there is always a husband, a boyfriend, or a father at the center of the conflict. And any advice given about love adheres to a strict sexual morality].<sup>66</sup> In the *Sueños* Stern appropriates and subverts the symbolism and iconography used by cultural and political institutions (such as domestic appliances, the figure of the baby, or the style and fashion worn by many of the dreamers) to visually reimagine the narratives constructed around womanhood and femininity<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, p. 149.

<sup>66</sup> Vezzetti, p. 154.

<sup>67</sup> "Stern se apropió y reelaboró zonas de la iconografía artística y resignificó, mediante la figuración visual, los relatos contruidos sobre la mujer." Paula Bertúa, 'Relatos modernos', p. 14



Figure 7: Page from *Idilio*.

The popular magazine *Idilio* was a product of its time. Directed at the newly emergent urban middle class of Argentina, this ‘feminine’ magazine reflects the anxieties of the ‘mujer moderna’, overburdened by her many obligations to occupy the role of political actor, professional, wife and mother. Rest’s analysis in ‘El psicoanálisis le ayudará’ reinforced many of the social codes that enforced these conventional expectations of women. In this section, I aim to show how Stern’s photomontages parody the conventional femininity promoted through cultural, political, and social institutions of

the time. I will cite Rest's written analyses and show how the ideological agenda behind Richard Rest's interpretation of these dreams is partially undermined by the parody present in the photomontages. Through the subversion of the status quo typically presented in the pages of this type of mainstream publication, Stern creates a parody of the encoded, regulated performance of femininity.

The production of this column took place as follows: a reader filled out a questionnaire published in the magazine and, after answering a series of 27 questions on subjects that range from her social behavior to her biggest fears to her childhood, described the dream she wanted analyzed. Both the questionnaire and dream description were sent to the offices of the Editorial Abril, where Enrique Butelman and Gino Germani would consult and produce their analysis of the selected dream. Together, the two men produced the dream interpretation that would be published under the pseudonym Richard Rest. Meanwhile, Stern composed an illustration of the dream using the description of the dream that had been sent by the reader.<sup>68</sup> The 'type' of dream in question was determined by Germani and Butelman, and would serve as the title of the photomontage. The photomontages carried titles that were uniformly constructed according to this type, for example: *Sueños de persecución*, *Sueños de situaciones ridículas*, *Sueños de angustia*, *Sueños de desastres cósmicos*, etc.<sup>69</sup> When Stern revised

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<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, the original descriptions of the dreams sent in by the readers are unavailable.

<sup>69</sup> "Una vez editada, la imagen le servía a Germani para generalizar el problema reflejado en la ilustración—aislamiento, angustia, disconformidad, desorientación—y comentarlo. Así, el fotomontaje servía como ejemplo típico bajo un título que el mismo Germani le aplicaba" (Once edited, Germani would use the image and generalize the problem that was reflected in the illustration—isolation, anxiety, discomfort, disorientation—and comment upon it. So, the photomontage served as the prototype of the title Germani would assign to it), Luis Priamo 'Notas sobre los Sueños de Grete Stern' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*, p. 20.



the *Sueños* for inclusion in an exhibition of her work in the 1960s, the titles (and in some cases the composition) of many of these pieces were altered.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps as a result of *Idilio*'s reputation as a popular 'women's' magazine, Enrique Butelman and Gino Germani chose to keep their names out of the project as much as possible, publishing under the pseudonym of Professor Richard Rest.<sup>71</sup> The written analyses in this column follow a cursory interpretive model that is loosely based on a Freudian approach to dream interpretation. However, Freudian psychoanalysis is amended in vital and significant ways in Rest's short interpretive texts, which imposed a new 'model' of interpretation on the dreams and reinforced a type of femininity consistent with the status quo that popular culture sought to maintain. A fundamental principle of Freudian dream analysis conveys that nothing is irrelevant; all the information articulated spontaneously in one's recollection of a dream sheds light on the subconscious or hidden meaning of that dream. In describing the process of dream analysis, Freud notes that the dreamer "must be told that the success of the psycho-analysis depends upon his noting and communicating everything that passes through his mind, and that he must not allow himself to suppress one idea because it seems to him unimportant or irrelevant to the subject, or another because it seems nonsensical."<sup>72</sup> In other words, the interpretation of a dream requires the dreamer to let go of her inclination to leave out certain elements of the dream and emphasize others. In the case of this column, however, the dreams were always made to conform to a model or 'type'

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<sup>70</sup> "Quince años más tarde de su aparición en la revista se exponen como obra autónoma. A partir de ese momento la polisemia de sus contenidos se multiplica: Stern recontextualiza la producción en un ámbito destinado al arte fotográfico; cambia los títulos que Gino Germani les había colocado." Paula Bertúa, 'Relatos modernos'.

<sup>71</sup> Luis Priamo 'Notas sobre los *Sueños* de Grete Stern' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 7

<sup>72</sup> Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Newburyport: Dover Publications, 2015), eBook, p. 37

articulated by their titles. What's more, a tendency to emphasize certain elements of the dream over others is inherent in the process of filling out a questionnaire: the dreamers were already engaged in self-censorship by deciding what to include in their written account of their dreams. The format of the questionnaire, intended to streamline and simplify the reading of these dreams, limits the potential interpretations they might inspire. The medium of photomontage, on the other hand, returns some of the freedom of spontaneous association and abstraction to the dreams in question. This is not to say that these images constitute an example of Freudian dream interpretation, but that the medium of photomontage is better suited than a questionnaire to portray the process free-association that is essential to the interpretation of dreams.

Germani set the compositional standards of the images, and stipulated how the dreams were to be illustrated. In her 'Apuntes sobre fotomontaje', Stern describes the specific directions she received, noting that she was encouraged to include certain objects and elements or compose the image according to a certain orientation:

Antes de comenzar mi labor, conversábamos con Germani acerca de la interpretación. Por lo general, ocurría que Germani me presentaba solicitudes referidas a la diagramación: que debía ser horizontal o vertical, o con un primer plano más oscuro que el fondo...En otras ocasiones me señalaba que tal figura debía aparecer haciendo esto o lo otro, o insistía para que aplicara elementos florales o animales [Before I began my work, Germani and I spoke about the interpretation. Generally, Germani would request a certain layout: that the image should be horizontal or vertical, or with a foreground that is darker than the background... other times he would tell me that the figure should be doing this or that, or he insisted that I include floral or animal elements in the image].<sup>73</sup>

The fact that Stern was encouraged to include 'animal or floral' elements in the images reveals the predetermined nature of this analysis. In considering the comedic effect of

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<sup>73</sup> Grete Stern, 'Apuntes sobre fotomontaje' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 29

Stern's representations, the explicit direction she received from Germani must be taken into account. As Paula Bertúa points out, "mientras el discurso verbal se atenía al refuerzo —con la perspectiva de un higienismo médico/psicoanalítico— de los estereotipos más tradicionales de la feminidad, el discurso visual de los fotomontajes socava con una mirada crítica e irónica dichos modelos" [While the verbal element reinforced—through the perspective of a medical/psychoanalytic hygienicism—the most traditional stereotypes of femininity, the visual element of the photomontages undermines this model with a critical and ironic gaze].<sup>74</sup> Considering how closely Stern and Germani collaborated, the frequent contrasts and contradictions between the written and visual components of this column are notable. Through the subversion of Rest's analysis, these photomontages convert the conservative, moralizing and formulaic approach to femininity present within the pages of *Idilio* into a joke shared among the magazine's readership.

The images analyzed in this chapter were selected as exemplary of the representation of women's unspoken sexuality, anguish and confinement in the series as a whole. These examples, as I will argue, also incorporate an element of humor. However, not all of the images will read as humorous to everyone. Because humor is always subjective, the comedic effect of these images will be clear for some readers than for others, depending upon the viewer's own orientation toward their subject and the context in which she or he encounters them. I hope to show, however, that Stern constructed these images with an awareness and sensitivity to the function of humor as a feminist technique. The comedic effect present in these photomontages (and in the disparity between the photomontages and Rest's moralizing analyses) was an invitation to the

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<sup>74</sup> Paula Bertúa, 'Los Sueños de Idilio' in *Boletín de estética* 6 (2008), p. 19

readers of *Idilio* to laugh at the superficial institutions of beauty and femininity propagated by popular culture and print media. In the following section, I analyze a selection of photomontages organized under a common heading or category. These categories refer to trends that emerge in examining the series as a whole, for example the presence of monstrous forms or phallic imagery. Within each section, I have selected three images to analyze that exemplify the trend in question.

## 2.1 *The Phallus*

In many of the photomontages in the *Sueños* series, phallic symbolism is central. From reptiles to cigarettes to bowling pins, the *Sueños* are rife with reference to sex, castration, and emasculation. Given the prominent place of sex and sexuality in Freudian dream interpretation (which reportedly informed much of Rest's analysis, as well)<sup>75</sup>, we can presume that any suggestion of these topics found in the descriptions of the dreams must have been intentionally trivialized or completely ignored in Rest's texts. Hugo Vezzetti addresses this absence of sex in the written analyses, stating: "los términos 'sexo' y 'sexualidad' están cuidadosamente excluidos del vocabulario del 'Profesor Richard Rest', quien da muestras de una amplia habilidad en el uso de alusiones y perífrasis para referirse a esa dimensión de la vida amorosa que, al mismo tiempo, está aludida casi todo el tiempo" [the terms 'sex' and 'sexuality' are carefully excluded from the vocabulary of 'Professor Richard Rest', who displays an impressive affinity for the use of allusions and paraphrase to refer to this dimension of romantic life which, at the

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<sup>75</sup> Vezzetti, p. 149

same time, he alludes to almost constantly].<sup>76</sup> The persistence of phallic imagery in Stern's photomontages highlights this overt lack of sexuality in Rest's analysis and pokes fun at the central significance of phallic symbolism in Freudian psychoanalysis.

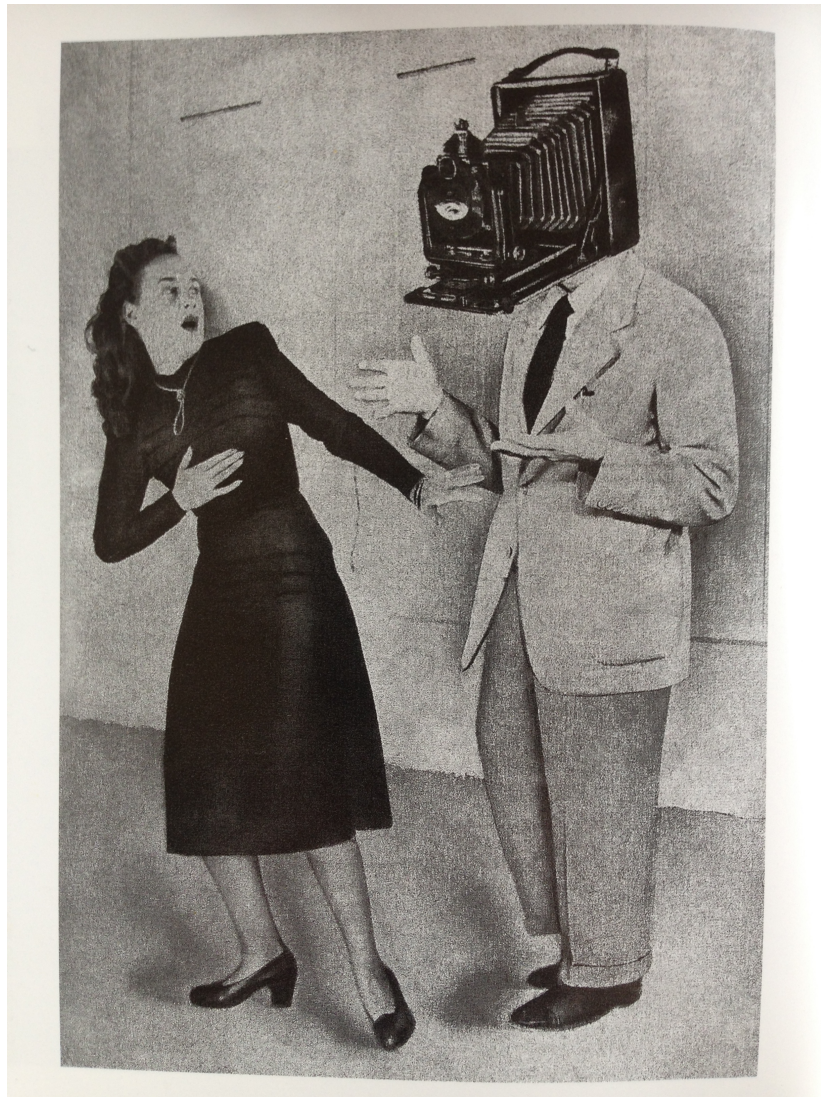


Figure 8: *Sueños de la fotografía* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Sueños de la fotografía* (Fig. 8), a classic comedic dynamic is established between the male and female characters in the image. The photomontage depicts a sort of

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<sup>76</sup> Vezzetti, p. 156

meta-melodrama in which the dreamer recoils from the phallus of the field camera that takes the place of her male companion's head. The dreamer and the male gaze are engaged in a struggle between truth and fiction, love and disgust. The male figure's stance suggests casual conversation. The dreamer, however, seems to be slipping out of the frame, off balance and in a state of panic. She wears pearls, heels, and modest black dress. Her hair is loose and she wears lipstick. The blank wall behind them offers no indication of any locatable setting, but the dress of both individuals suggests they belong to the upper-middle class and are dressed for a night out. The young woman in this image is petrified and recoils, leaning dramatically away from her companion. Though their bodies occupy an equal amount of space in the frame, the male figure towers over her, and a large-format field camera, bellows extended, replaces his head. An image of a tiny eye takes the place of the camera's viewfinder. His hands are open in a kind of appeal, and his stance seems casual and relaxed in contrast to hers. He wears a suit jacket and tie, and appears to be peering out of the corner of his photographic eye, scrutinizing the dreamer closely. His gesture suggests that he is trying to reason with her, calm her down or offer some explanation or excuse, though he is completely unaware of his condition. While she recoils in anguish, he seems to perform the character of a straight man in a slapstick setting, obviously clueless to her emotional and overstated anguish. The camera-man hybrid, with bellows extended and orientated towards the fearful woman, represents the phallus that is central to this dream.

In Rest's written component, the reader is urged to comply with the sentimental imperative of being true to her self. According to his text, the camera symbolizes the subject's anxiety over the false pretenses through which she has attracted her partner.

Meanwhile, his ‘ojo fotográfico’ signals the anxiety that her deception will be revealed, given the camera’s supposed ability to capture and pin down the truth of its subject. The significance of the camera, according to Rest, “es evidente: teme ella que la conozcan en su verdadera personalidad [is evident: she fears that he will see her real personality]”. The photographic eye that the man fixes on the dreamer is the source of the dreamer’s anxiety; she fears his penetrating gaze that can see past the superficial performance she has put on in order to seem attractive. “Había mentido tanto con respeto a sí misma, habíase mostrado, con el fin de atraerlo, tan diferente de lo que en realidad era, al joven que le interesaba, que ahora se aterroriza ante la idea de que éste la vea como en verdad es” [She has lied so much about who she is, she presented herself, with the intention of attracting him, so differently from her true self, that now she is terrified by the idea that he will somehow see her for what she really is].<sup>77</sup> In Stern’s image, the act of recoiling from a man with a camera for a face is related to her desire. This image inspires comedic effect in the exaggerated disparity between the attitudes of the man and woman pictured. The monstrosity of the man’s camera head hybrid is funny in part because he is completely oblivious to it. While the dreamer is clearly alarmed by her male counterpart’s appearance, he is unaware of his appearance and he seems to interpret her distress as an overreaction. While Rest seems to scold the dreamer for being deceptive, the image shows a theatrical exaggeration of this deception between the dreamer and a grotesque man-camera hybrid. The dreamer, in Stern’s image, is clearly the victim of the

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<sup>77</sup> The complete texts of Richard Rest’s analyses that accompanied the *Sueños* are included in the Appendix. All texts and images from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003).



man's voyeuristic and sexual advances. Rest's interpretation, however, seems to suggest that it is the male counterpart who has fallen victim to the dreamer's deception.



Figure 9: *Sueños de los conflictos matrimoniales* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Sueños de los conflictos matrimoniales* (Fig. 9), the domestic chores and duties that the dreamer is obliged to perform intervene in the oneiric imaginary and illuminate



the insecurity she feels in her marriage. In the photomontage, we see a woman in the act of ironing what appears to be a miniaturized, flattened image of a man wearing a wrinkled shirt. In one hand, she cradles the limp, flattened male figure and with the other she passes an iron over his legs, in front of his genitals. Though the woman's face and head are not included in the image, her clothing style, jewelry and iron in hand all indicate that she belongs to the upper-middle class profile Stern's protagonists typically appear to occupy. Her long checkered skirt is very pragmatic; she wears the modest clothing of a housewife. The hand that grasps the iron wears a bracelet and ring. The male figure wears a slight smirk on his face and his clothing is loose and wrinkled. He is pictured upside-down on the ironing board. His stance appears confident and relaxed, an attitude that is also worn in his facial expression. His gaze is directed slightly away from the viewer. He is held by his wife's hand but appears to turn away from her slightly, as though lazily struggling to escape her grip. His expression is neutral and nonplussed, which heightens the absurdity and humor of this image. In Stern's illustration, the husband is clearly characterized as thin and two-dimensional. He appears to be a single piece of paper or fabric pressed against the board and held between his wife's two fingers. This flatness of his body alludes to a flatness of character or obliviousness to what is taking place, given his lack of reaction.

Richard Rest's analysis describes the domestic duties carried out by the dreamer as "un símbolo de la vida hogareña y de la tranquilidad y la paz de la existencia familiar" [a symbol of the home life and the tranquility and peace of the family]. In a reversal of these peaceful and tranquil associations, however, the act of ironing comes to symbolize the deep turmoil this young wife experiences in her marriage. In analyzing this situation,

Rest looks to the definition of ‘planchar’, declaring that to iron is to “alisar una cosa, quitar las arrugas o asperezas, dejarla en las condiciones necesarias para que se la pueda utilizar con comodidad” [smooth something out, remove the creases, to leave something in the necessary conditions for it to be used comfortably]. This, Rest purports, is exactly what the young wife wants to do with her new husband. He concludes that a lack of mutual understanding is at the root of this imagery. “Había asperezas entre ellos, y son precisamente éstas las que la esposa le quiere quitar.” [There was a conflict between them, and this is exactly what the wife seeks to remove]. In other words, the act of ironing symbolizes the wife’s desire to smooth out her relationship, or some conflict that has presented itself in her dream. Stern’s visual interpretation suggests other, deeper issues at stake.

In ironing out her husband, the wife seeks to bridge an emotional gap between the two of them. She works to remove these “wrinkles” by carrying out her domestic duties and adhering to her role as wife and homemaker. Her efforts, however, are evidently only met with the disheveled appearance and cold gaze of her husband. The image contrasts the husband’s flatness (suggested by his expressionless face and literal flatness) with his wife’s dominating attentiveness (she cradles his flat form and works to remove the wrinkles that appear on his shirt and jacket). The strategic placement of the iron over the man’s genitals suggests that the housewife is symbolically castrating her husband through her careful attention to her wifely duties. The phallic iron, like the extended bellows of the field camera in the *Sueños de fotografía*, points to an element of sexual anxiety at the heart of this conflict. The domestic appliance is literally positioned as a sort of punch line to the conflict of the unhappy housewife. The symbolic weight lent to the act of ironing is

converted into a cartoonish illustration of the tensions involved in the domestic dynamics of husband and wife. The housewife is depicted as a hybrid homemaker/castrator, holding the appliance of the iron over her husband's phallus.

While Rest's analysis suggests the explanation of the dream is as logical as the seamless relation between domestic chores and the peace and tranquility of the home, Stern's illustration portrays this equivalence between household appliances and domestic tranquility as absurd. Again, this image is amusing for the absurdity of the situation pictured, the man's apparent obliviousness, and the way in which it undermines Rest's analysis. In the photomontage, the dreamer literally holds all the power in her hands. Though only pictured from the waist down, the dreamer appears as the dominating, decisive force in fate of her relationship. The husband, like the tranquil home life ensured by the dreamer's domestic diligence, is represented as an unsubstantial and literally 'thin' fantasy. In Stern's montage, this domestic drama plays out as a humorous criticism of the superficiality of the roles allotted to husband and wife.



Figure 10: *Sueños de celos* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Los sueños de celos* (Fig. 10), a man's face consumes almost the entire frame of the photomontage. His expression is enormous and imposing, and, like the man pictured in *Sueños de conflicto matrimoniales*, he smirks and looks in the direction of the viewer. In this case, however, his gaze is obscured and he wears dark sunglasses. In each lens of the glasses, the faces of two attractive women are pictured. In one lens, a young woman beams, looking up, her head tilted to the left. In the other, a different woman

looks up with a sultry expression. In their exaggerated poses and glossy appearances both female figures resemble models in an advertisement. In fact, the whole scene could be an advertisement for cigarettes. From underneath a well-groomed mustache, a large cigarette balances between the man's lips, angled outward and toward the viewer from the very center of the frame. The size of the cigarette, proportionate to the man's face, looms underneath the female faces pictured in his sunglass lenses.

The written analysis that accompanies this dream seems particularly disciplinary. From the outset, Rest informs the reader that “éste es un sueño de una joven celosa, celosa en exceso” [this is the dream of a jealous girl, excessively jealous] whose dream “le reveló lo ridículo e insensato de su conducta” [reveals the ridiculousness and foolishness of her behavior]. Rest asserts that the jealousy and insecurity expressed in this dream will end up destroying the dreamer's relationship. Using the device of the unconscious, he implies that dreamer must prioritize this relationship over the doubt and discomfort she feels. Rest states, “Sus celos ya no pertenecen a aquellos que pueden considerarse como derivados de un gran cariño, sino que entran en la categoría de los que más bien constituyen una manifestación de egoísmo desmesurado que en realidad muy poco tiene que ver con el amor” [Her jealousy exceeds that which could be considered affectionate, and in fact reflects a type of jealousy that constitutes a manifestation of completely irrational ego-centrism that in reality has very little to do with love]. Rest scolds the dreamer for the unprecedented jealousy she feels, then warns that if she continues in this childish manner she will lose her lover, in this way, placing the integrity of the dreamer's judgment in doubt and advising her to behave appropriately and trust

blindly in the logic of true love. Ultimately, the dreamer is urged to control her jealousy in the interest of preserving her relationship above all else.

Stern's photomontage contributes some levity to Rest's scolding. In the photomontage, the man is again clearly antagonist in the situation. His gaze is obscured by the image of two distinct women, emphasizing that his desire and wandering eye have already made him inaccessible. While his gaze meets that of the viewer, he is hidden behind sunglasses, shielding him from exposure. This photomontage appears to be a joke in the content that is so contradictory to the analysis of Richard Rest. The conflict of the dreamer's jealousy appears completely justified by Stern's representation of the situation, in which sex, represented through a cigarette, features centrally and the man in question is obscured by his interest in other women.

In each of these examples, the male figure's gaze is obscured: he looks away from the viewer, wears dark sunglasses, or peers out of a camera. Though the male figure can look, he cannot be seen. The men in the photomontages are protected from scrutiny though able to scrutinize the viewer and their female counterparts. In this way, these photomontages associate the men represented with voyeurism, and the illicit sexual desire it suggests.<sup>78</sup> Phallic imagery also recurs in these examples: the extended field camera replacing the male character's head in *Sueños de la fotografía*, the strategically-placed iron in the *Sueños de conflictos matrimoniales*, and the inclusion of the enormous and centrally-located cigarette protruding from the man's lips in the *Sueños de celos* all resemble unmistakably phallic symbols. In these photomontages, voyeurism and emasculation point to a dimension of sexuality that is completely absent from Rest's

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<sup>78</sup> See Sandra Phillips, 'Voyeurism and Desire' in *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), p. 55

analysis. If a “good photomontage has the effect of a good joke”, the ‘punch line’ of these photomontages is clear.<sup>79</sup> The most obvious joke is that played on Rest’s completely humorless analysis and the obliviousness of the male figures represented.

## 2.2 *Monsters*

A female protagonist features centrally in nearly all of the photomontages that make up the *Sueños* series. She is typically pictured in distressing, overwhelming, or confusing situations. Punctuating many of these situations is the figure of the monster, threatening the dreamer and embodying the conflict or anxiety she experiences in her dream. These monsters take many forms, from a hybrid train-turtle to a series of disembodied eyes. Their presence is registered and defined by the dreamer’s reactions of terror, surprise, or anguish. In the majority of cases, these reactions are pictured with exaggerated theatricality.

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<sup>79</sup> Quote attributed to Lukács in Ades, *Photomontage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), p. 57





Figure 11: *Sueños de trenes* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Sueños de trenes* (Fig. 11), a train with the head of a snapping turtle leaps out of the ocean and through space, jaws open, hurtling towards the figure of a well-dressed young woman. As in the *Sueños de la fotografía*, the dreamer recoils, though her reaction seems markedly understated. Both her dress and her reaction read as completely incongruous to her situation: she wears a long, modest skirt and veil. The cracked sand and rain clouds gathering above her create an apocalyptic scene, made all the more terrifying by the figure of the monster-train hurtling towards her. Though the monster that pursues her is evidently very frightening, she seems only slightly startled, lifting her hand to her mouth in a ladylike gesture of mild disturbance or surprise. The *Sueños de trenes* is



one of the most characteristically Surrealist photomontages in the series, given the juxtaposition of human, animal and mechanical elements it includes.<sup>80</sup>

In the first lines of Rest's analysis we learn that "los sueños relacionados con viajar, con vías, trenes y ferrocarriles...casi nunca deja(n) de referirse a lo que podríamos llamar 'el viaje de la vida'" [dreams that are related to travel, roads, trains and automobiles ... almost always refer to what we may call 'the journey of life']. Beyond this formulaic and simplified association, Rest's response to the dreamer is, again, moralizing and patronizing. He refers to her supposed fear of trains as childish, given that the train "aparece con el carácter de un monstruo amenazador que muy a menudo asume en la niñez" [appear to be a threatening monster, as it often does in childhood], framing the appearance of this train as residual childish naivety. Rest's tidy conclusion and quick-fix approach to the monsters of the subconscious does carry over into Stern's visual analysis.

Where Rest's analysis glosses over and completely ignores the phallic symbolism and the dreamer's nightmarish fear, Stern's photomontage suggests another possible cause of the dreamer's nightmarish encounter with the train, acknowledging the possibility that in the depths of the dreamer's subconscious, the unrest she must face is sexual. The advice Rest gives the dreamer to take control of her life and acknowledge her childish fear of life stands in stark opposition to the Stern's photomontage, which portrays these circumstances as truly terrifying yet farcical and completely bizarre. In this case, the comedic effect of the image is not immediately discernable. However, the incongruity of the dreamer's reaction to her situation underscores an overall sense of

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<sup>80</sup> Dawn Ades, "The juxtaposition of the human and the mechanical was a recurrent theme in the montages of the Berlin Dadaists" in *Photomontage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), p. 36

absurdity that inspires laughter of surprise, wonder or puzzlement. The impossibility of this reptilian train monster hurtling out of the sea comes to resemble a joke in itself and points to the ways in which our internal, psychological monsters are always, ultimately, imaginary.



Figure 12: *Sueños de muñecos* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

*Los sueños de muñecos* (Fig. 12) immediately precedes the *Sueños de trenes* in the series. Considering the two together is useful in articulating how anxiety and conflict, related to the terms of conventional femininity, are embodied in the *Sueños* series as

monsters. In these two photomontages, the dreamer's reaction is completely incongruous with the object of fear. In the *Sueños de trenes*, her response to the situation seems understated, while the dreamer in *Sueños de muñecos* expresses an exaggerated terror in the face of the 'monster' in question. Another interesting parallel between the two photomontages is the orientation of the dreamer and the object she recoils from: in the *Sueños de muñecos*, she faces the viewer with her hands over her face, while the monster faces her. In the *Sueños de trenes*, the reptilian train leaps out of the ocean towards the viewer and the dreamer turns away from the viewer to face it. In one case, an oncoming train has sexual and phallic connotation. In the other, a baby looms over the cowering dreamer.

In the *Sueños de muñecos*, the figure of a baby with its arms outstretched towards the dreamer dominates the frame. The dreamer stands a distance away from it, recoiling with her hands over her face. She is pictured wearing formal, modest clothing. The image seems like a still from a horror film: two walls enclose the dreamer and there is a sense that the monster, in this case, is approaching her. The baby is oversized, with a mass and height equal to hers. Both figures face each other on a narrow sidewalk. In her dream, the subject encountered this doll and felt simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by it. Rest insists that "la imagen onírica del muñeco representa aquí un contenido inconsciente de su psique, una parte de su personalidad, a la que, en su vida real, la soñadora no ha prestado atención" [the oneiric image of the doll here represents subconscious material in [her] psyche, some part of her personality that, in her waking life, she has not paid attention to]. This analysis very closely resembles that of *Los sueños de trenes*, in which the monster is described easily as some unconscious material the dreamer has repressed.

The pattern of revulsion seems to follow a particular formula in the written analysis, which argues that this fear or disgust is nothing more than unprocessed information or an undiscovered piece of the dreamer's psychology.

This scene of terror and anguish is punctuated again by a sense of the absurd: the baby, the embodiment of harmlessness and need, inspires anguish in the dreamer that seems completely overstated and inappropriate given the situation. However, the photomontage seems to suggest that it is the pressure of maternity and motherhood this dreamer recoils from. The image of a woman recoiling from a baby doll at first appears almost silly. This scenario is related to the pressure to bear and raise children that women faced under the renewed emphasis on the family under Peronism, representing this anxiety and societal pressure surrounding maternity and motherhood through distorted parody. The “monster” in question (an animated baby doll the dreamer is both attracted to and repulsed by) becomes terrifying in its need for and pursuit of the dreamer. The humor in this photomontage resides in the dreamer's seemingly inappropriate reaction of anguish when confronted with the figure of a harmless baby doll. This perceived incongruity reveals the expectations held by the viewer surrounding how a woman fitting a certain profile to should react to a baby reaching out to her, namely with care and affection. There is a direct contradiction of this expectation that again can have a comedic result. The photomontage is at once sympathetic and empowering: the dreamer, instead of cowering and refusing to face this monster, must confront and identify the true source of her anguish: the societal pressure to conform to a maternal role.

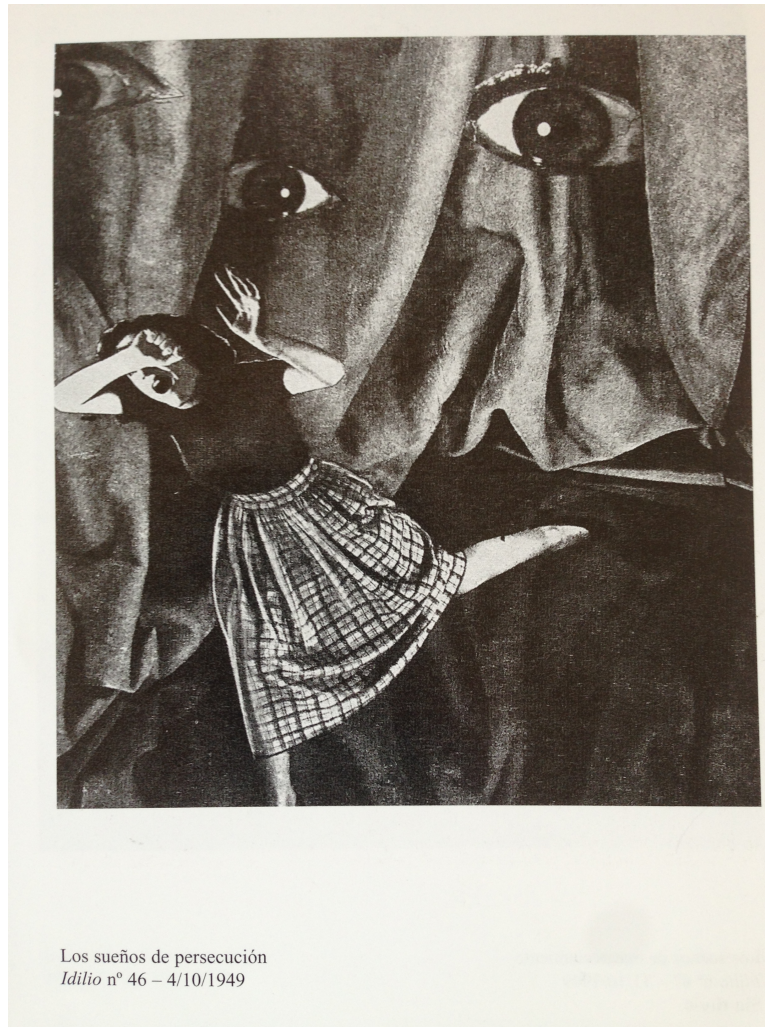


Figure 13: *Los sueños de persecución* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Los sueños de persecución* (Fig. 13), the dreamer flees from multiple disembodied eyes. She is pictured with her hand covering her face and her mouth open in an expression of terror. Disembodied eyes surround and loom above her, and the scene is set against a backdrop of a thick curtain. She runs over a reflective stage. The setting is difficult to identify and evokes a sense of intense disorientation, and closely resembles the dream sequence scene in Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), designed by Surrealist icon Salvador Dalí. The eyes that pursue the dreamer are bloodshot and stare intensely, yet

appear a bit ridiculous and cartoonish. She covers her own eyes with her hand, refusing to meet the gaze that stalks her.

This written analysis is one of the few in which the dreamer's account of her dream is quoted directly. 'Huí presa de angustia', contó luego la protagonista, 'en una interminable fuga, tratando desesperadamente de esconderme antes esas miradas'" [I fled, a prisoner of fear', the subject stated, 'in an endless flight, trying desperately to hide myself from these gazes']. Richard Rest's interpretation of this dream insists that the dreamer experiences a "fuerte complejo de culpabilidad en el inconsciente" (strong subconscious guilt complex), and this guilt comes from a fundamental attitude she has taken towards her life. Again, Rest's analysis speaks in sweeping generalities, explaining that the distress experienced by the dreamer is a result of her inadequate knowledge of herself. While Rest insists that the imagery of the staring eyes points to an underlying feeling of guilt deep within the dreamer's subconscious, Stern's image illuminates the much more interesting dynamic between the (female) object of the gaze and the consumer of her image.

The nightmarish scene of the dreamer pursued by staring eyes seems perfectly placed in the pages of a popular magazine. In Stern's image, the oversized, looming eyes that chase the dreamer appear to be a kind of caricature of the male gaze in popular visual culture. The dreamer's inability to escape this gaze points out the irony of this dream's publication in *Idilio*. That is, the dreamer's anxiety of being pursued by the gaze is pictured for the visual consumption of other readers, thus bringing her nightmare to life. In the photomontage eyes stare directly back at the viewer while she runs out of the frame with her eyes shut, refusing to engage in the exchange of looking. Stern's image reveals

the paradox of this character seeking to escape a gaze, despite being represented in the pages of a magazine for the visual consumption of a public. The photomontage plays with this endless exchange of exposure and looking. The sheer melodrama of the scene results in comedic effect. Again, the dreamer's reaction and the actual threat she perceives appear to be incongruous. The theatricality is highlighted by the presence of heavy curtains, the reflective stage, and the reference to Dalí's cinematic dream sequence. The eyes, though clearly terrifying to the dreamer, appear comedic and benign. They stare directly at the viewer, apparently symbolizing interrogation and pointing to the relations of sight that take place in this column and the magazine as a whole.

These melodramatic and nightmarish scenes of distress can be seen to reflect a more general anxiety regarding the restructuring of family, gender roles, and political expectation taking place during these years in Argentina. The monsters point to the dreamer's anxiety about failing to live up to demands of conventional femininity. Through absurdity, melodrama, and incongruity Stern constructs scenes of anguish that nonetheless involve comedic effect and the empowerment of awareness. The photomontages depict these monstrous forms as flimsy fabrications. When pictured in terrifying or distressing situations, the fears and anxieties of the dreamers (represented as reptilian trains or baby dolls) appear cartoonish. This comedic effect of the images does not belittle the anguish of the dreamer, but empowers her to confront and realize her ability to laugh at these monsters. The depiction of this anguish points to the need for the dreamer to confront these monsters and treat them as nothing more than figments of an imagination steeped in the patriarchy and the status quo.

### 2.3 Confinement

In the *Sueños*, the home and partnership are frequently represented as spaces of confinement. The dreamers are pictured trapped; stuck, or literally tied down by various structures that reveal how these institutions structure their waking lives. While Rest's analysis typically attributes this entrapment to the dreamers' own personal weakness or ignorance of her true self, Stern's images suggest that the dreamers are debilitated by a society that regulates and limits the options available to the female subject. Stern illustrates the dreamer trapped by romantic, professional, and spiritual conflict that can be traced back to her containment within a patriarchal society. Though she is trapped, there is empowerment in Stern's representation of the dreamer's entrapment, and the photomontages suggest that the dreamer can surpass her confinement simply by realizing its existence. Again, there is humor present in the absurd situations depicted in these photomontages and the dreamer is represented as invested with agency when she becomes aware of her confinement.





Figure 14: *Los sueños de ambición* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Los sueños de ambición* (Fig. 14) the dreamer appears literally suffocated by a domestic space that she has outgrown. A well-dressed woman crouches in the sitting room of a house that appears to be far too small for her. This photomontage could be an illustration of the scene from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) in which Alice grows too large for the room that contains her. The room itself is decorated with works of art, a lace tablecloth, a rug and a chandelier, evidently situated in an upper-class home. The dreamer's clothing and style are consistent with this profile: her hair is

neatly arranged; she wears formal clothing and earrings and has an overall elegant appearance that heightens the absurdity of her uncomfortable state. Her physical position, gesture and facial expression all give the impression that she has outgrown the room that contains her. Her head approaches the ceiling and her hand shields her face protectively as though her size increases with each passing moment.

In Rest's analysis, he again makes reference to the dreamer's ignorance of her own desires and intentions. According to him, she has outgrown the environment that surrounds her. This environment is defined (in very obtuse terms) as "la vida que vivimos, el ambiente en que nos movemos, nuestras amistades, nuestras tareas, en suma, todas aquellas que en conjunto forman nuestra atmósfera vital" [the life we live, the spaces we move through, our friendships, duties, in sum, all that together forms our vital environment]. Rest explains that the dreamer is experiencing a moment in her life when she feels superior or bigger than what she has; she is inflated by her ambition and is growing beyond the confines of her current life. According to Rest, the dreamer "ha crecido, es decir, ha evolucionado espiritualmente. Su vida actual—simbolizada por su habitación—ya le queda chica" [has grown, has spiritually evolved. Her current life—symbolized by her room—is now too small for her]. Rest's very general description of this environment is depicted literally in Stern's representation as the confining space of the home.

In this photomontage, the home, highly adorned and decorated, appears to be a type of cage that the dreamer is trapped within. Together, the stiff modesty of her dress and the formal decoration of the room amplify the stifling situation depicted in this image. The bars on the banister of the stairs behind the dreamer read as the bars of a cage.

The dreamer's oversized figure dwarfs the furniture and decorations that surround her. Though she is clearly distressed, this image is one of empowerment. With the realization that she is caged in, the possibility opens for the dreamer to break free from the restrictive conditions that surround her. While Rest's analysis encourages the dreamer to follow her dreams and ambitions, Stern's image articulates that this is impossible without first escaping the physical structure of the home. This image proves much more amusing than Rest's stern words of wisdom, revealing the dreamer caught in a performance of upper-middle class domesticity that has gotten out of control. Though the dreamer is otherwise completely suited to the environment that encloses her, her enormous size lends a farcical tone to this otherwise stuffy scenario.



Figure 15: *Los sueños de reminiscencias* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Los sueños de reminiscencias* (Fig. 15) a young girl swoons outside a stark concrete building. Above her, a man dressed in a suit and tie reaches his arms out of an upstairs window and looks down towards her. She stands on a ground of jagged, loose rock and the glimpse of sky visible above the top of the house looks stormy and dark. The building, a concrete cube, overwhelms the frame of the image and in its center a net, which seems to fall from the man's outstretched arms and onto the young girl, is pictured. The house in this image is nothing more than a concrete box with a single window. The

stark, rough surface of concrete overwhelms the frame. The net descends and the character of her long-lost lover looks down to her with overacted love and affection. In this image, the dreamer is pictured as trapped within the confines of a romantic narrative. This scene can be read as a subversion of the standards of romance and courtship, or a reversal of the iconic *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene. In the photomontage gender roles are reversed as the woman stands beneath the window reaching above her toward the object of her affection. Stern's image proposes that as long as the dreamer's liberation lies within her inflated expectations of romantic love, she is already be ensnared in this net.

In Richard Rest's analysis, he easily concludes that the dream refers to long lost love. The concrete structure represents the house from her adolescence with a young man in it who she has long associated with friendship and affection. As Rest reports, "una vez más hallamos aquí cómo el inconsciente revela el verdadero significado de una relación" [once again we see here how the unconscious reveals the true significance behind a relationship]. In this passage and elsewhere, Rest positions the subconscious as a kind of authority who reveals the truth behind these dreams. The house contains no doors or windows, other than the one through which the dreamer sees her friend. Equating the house (according to Rest considered "un símbolo típicamente femenino" [a typically feminine symbol]) with the dreamer's adolescence or youth, Rest concludes that the dreamer is being told by her unconscious to return to her youth and confront her romantic love for her friend.

While Rest's analysis sticks closely to the formula of a storybook romance, Stern's image proposes an alternative interpretation. The centrally placed net that is about

to fall directly on the dreamer is mentioned nowhere in Rest's text. Rest describes the dreamer "bailando frente la casa de la adolescencia" [dancing in front of the house of her adolescence] with no reference to the web or net about to ensnare her that is pictured in Stern's illustration. The home, a supposedly "typically feminine symbol", is pictured as nightmarish and unwelcoming. However, the dreamer seems entirely unaware of these hostile surroundings: she and the man in the window wear placid, smiling expressions. They are dressed in formal clothing, he wears a suit and she a sundress. The threatening environment and the net descending on the dreamer frames her happiness as obliviousness or an unquestioning acceptance of the roles they must play in the story of their romance.

In this example, the dreamer seems unaware of or unwilling to recognize the confinement in her future. The photomontage can be read as a foreboding depiction of what awaits her if she is to take Rest's advice. The comedic effect resides in this subtle but evident subversion of the fairytale romance predicted by the written analysis. This photomontage urges the dreamer to resist the unrealistic expectations Rest encourages her to adopt. Instead, the trap of thinking in these unrealistic and overly romantic terms is revealed to the dreamer. The subtle reversal of conventional gender roles and expectations pictured here contributes to the comedic effect of this image. In addition, the occurrence of obliviousness (on the part of both the dreamer and the man, in this example) again speaks to the humor of realizing the absurdity in this situation.



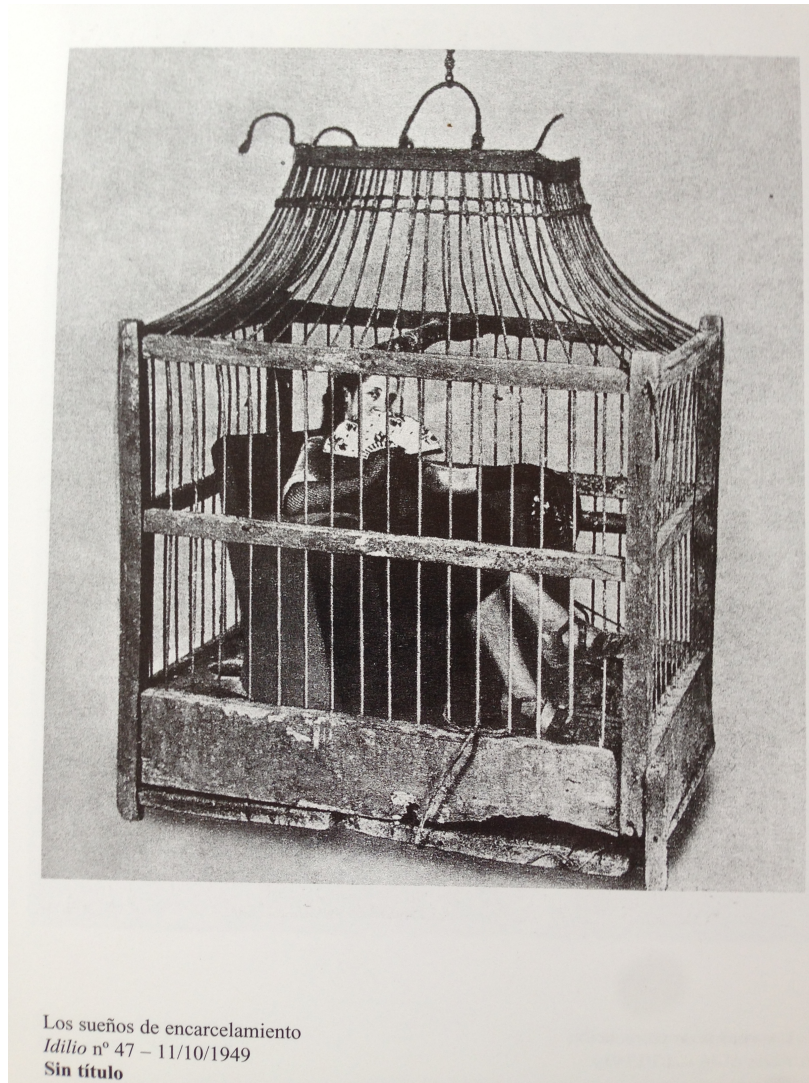


Figure 16: *Los sueños de encarcelamiento* from *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)*.

In *Los sueños de encarcelamiento* (Fig. 16), the dreamer is represented contained in a birdcage, allegedly as a result of her own prejudices. Though there is no mention of the home or domestic space in this analysis, this photomontage is one of the most explicit illustrations of imprisonment that appears in the *Sueños* series. She is confined, but the dreamer sits comfortably and confidently on an armchair with her legs crossed, staring at the viewer from behind a fan. Her expression is defiant and seductive. She is dressed

formally in a black dress and long black gloves. Almost the whole frame of this image is filled with the image of a birdcage, hanging in an otherwise empty space. The chain from which the cage hangs leads out of the frame. Though the fan obscures half of her face, the dreamer makes direct eye contact with the viewer. She seems quite at home in her containment, seemingly comfortable in her birdcage and confident in her attitude towards the world. The comfort of the armchair, as well as the formal clothing and accessories that she wears seem suggest that this literal cage is just an extension of a more abstract imprisonment within which she feels quite in control.

Rest's analysis centers on the woman's social and psychological entrapment that, according to him, she has imposed on herself. This dream is apparently one of a type of dreams that "simboliza la conducta total o, mejor dicho, la posición de la persona con respecto a las más importantes cuestiones de la vida" [symbolize overall conduct, or, the position of the person with respect to life's most important questions]. This dream of being imprisoned in a cage points to the dreamer's "falsos prejuicios [que] le impedían la libre y franca manifestación de su ser, convirtiéndola en una persona tímida y carente de iniciativa" [false prejudices that have impeded the honest manifestation of her being, converting her into a timid person who lacks initiative]. In Stern's image, the dreamer does not come across as timid in the least. In fact, she seems defiant in her imprisonment. From her clothing and to the expression she wears she seems to hold absolute authority within the birdcage that confines her. The simple composition of this image and the incongruity of the dreamer's satisfaction at being contained present the viewer with a puzzling scene. From within the birdcage, the dreamer possesses a seductive and confident attitude of defiance. The image of a woman sitting confidently in an armchair



trapped within a birdcage reads as humorous and strange due to her apparent confidence within this confinement. This image simultaneously acknowledges and exposes underlying societal trends that contribute to this recurring motif in women's dreams.

The frequency with which dreamers are pictured as entrapped or contained in the *Sueños* series reveals this to be a more general, consistent anxiety of the readers of *Idilio*. There is a range of circumstances that Rest attributes to this sense of entrapment that typically reduce to the dreamers' lack of charisma or self-knowledge. However, through Stern's images, the regularity of this sense of entrapment becomes clear. In her illustrations, Stern suggests the confinement of the female subject is a result of her domestic or maternal obligations, as well as the institutions or expectations that structure her behavior and appearance (such as the male gaze). Stern represents the dreamers' awareness or agency in their realization of this entrapment with humor.

While Rest's textual analysis follows a predictable and superficial formula, typically reinforcing conventional femininity through moralizing and patronizing advice regarding the home and family, love, and staying 'true' to the self, Stern's visual accompaniment presents absurd illustrations of these dreams that expose the convention contained within Rest's analysis. Through photomontage, Stern presents the superficial codes and anxieties surrounding conventional femininity as absurd and farcical.<sup>81</sup> By creating strange and unsettling representations of women's dreams (and the presence of certain conventions in these dreams), Stern invites the readers and dreamers of this column to consider the conditions of their waking life and dreams alike from a distance enabled by humor. In the following chapter, I describe exactly how these images invite

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<sup>81</sup> "Stern se apropió y reelaboró zonas de la iconografía artística y resignificó, mediante la figuración visual, los relatos contruidos sobre la mujer." Bertúa, 'Relatos modernos', p. 14

the readership of *Idilio* to participate in this empowering laughter directed at the demanding performance of femininity they were subject to.

### **Chapter Three: Feminism and Comedic Effect**

Our status as observers is itself flexible, allowing for temporal differences in what strikes one as funny. Contingency permeates the two poles of humor: observer and observed.

-Martin Shuster, 'Humor as an Optics'<sup>82</sup>

This chapter will be dedicated to the relationship between the *Sueños* series and humor. Specifically, I aim to address the questions: to what extent can Stern's photomontages be considered funny? What type of laughter do these images inspire? How does humor contribute to the feminist function of the series? In exploring the presence of humor in the *Sueños*, I will first situate this work in a tradition of Surrealist feminist art. Following the reflections of Whitney Chadwick and Jo Anna Isaak, I argue that women artists' contributions to the Surrealist movement are essential examples of this link between feminism and humor. I then describe some prominent theories of humor, specifically the incongruity theory and Martin Shuster's reflections on Henri Bergson thoughts on humor. Both theoretical frameworks will guide my elaboration of how humor contributes to the social impact of Stern's series. The conditions of comedic effect are parallel to the practice of photomontage; in both cases, interrupting, fragmenting, or scrambling the viewer's expectations overturns convention and meaning.

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<sup>82</sup> Martin Shuster, 'Humor as an Optics: Bergson and the Ethics of Humor' in *Hypatia* vol. 28, no. 3 (Summer 2013), p. 623

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Stern's photomontages and the circumstances of their production can be understood as humorous. Ultimately, I will argue that this series can be understood as an example of comedic feminist art insofar as it calls attention to the conventions of femininity through the political device of humor. Many feminist artists' reactions to Surrealism employ comedic effect as a tool of intervention into this male-dominated movement.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Stern explores the playful and absurd elements of consciousness and reason, illustrating the social codes that govern women's behavior and appearance by isolating and decontextualizing them. In order to argue that the *Sueños* series functions as social satire, I will briefly address the relationship between comedy, feminist art and Surrealism.

The form of photomontage, the circumstances of this series' circulation (in collaboration with and in response to a psychoanalytic text in a popular magazine), and the historical moment in which it was produced has led many critics to situate the *Sueños* in a tradition of Surrealist feminist art. Stern herself, in her 'Apuntes sobre fotomontaje', references Surrealism, describing how the movement integrated photomontage into the art world in the wake of Dadaist contributions to the medium.<sup>84</sup> She quotes André Breton, "jefe del Surrealismo" (founder of Surrealism), and argues that the movement signifies a "rechazo de todo lo conocido" (rejection of everything familiar)<sup>85</sup>. The Surrealist movement, as Stern explains in her 'Apuntes', was founded in 1924, by 'jóvenes' (young people) including Dalí, Tanguy, Magritte, and Man Ray. The Surrealist objective was

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<sup>83</sup> Jo Anna Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 192

<sup>84</sup> Stern notes that the Surrealists and Dadaists alike "descubrieron en la fotografía un elemento nuevo y distinto para la realización de sus composiciones en combinación con el dibujo y con la pintura", 'Apuntes sobre la fotomontaje' in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 13

<sup>85</sup> Stern, p. 14

similar to that of Dadaism in that it sought to overturn conventions of art, life, and everything in between.<sup>86</sup> Though Stern's work possesses qualities that echo both movements, and (as was noted in Chapter One) she was clearly influenced by the legacy of Berlin Dadaists, the *Sueños* series is most easily aligned with Surrealism: its representation of dreamscapes (a favorite subject for the Surrealists) challenges our understanding of the laws and expectations that govern our experience of reality. It is important to note that Stern does not explicitly describe her own practice in these terms. What's more, this designation is complicated by the central placement of the female subject in this series. Before we can accept that the *Sueños* series is Surrealist, the complicated sexual politics of this movement must be addressed. The fraught relationship between feminism and Surrealism is a massive area of scholarship and inquiry. In the limited space of this chapter, though, a description of this relationship must be condensed to a brief description of this movement's contributions to the link between humor and feminist art.

At the heart of Surrealist ideology was an intention to overturn tradition and free the mind from social constraints and habits.<sup>87</sup> Despite this break with tradition, social constraints and expectations, the movement's conservative approach to gender roles continues to complicate the feminist history of this movement. An eroticizing male gaze that saturates many Surrealist artworks directly contradicts the principals of agency and freedom that are integral to this movement's ideology. Though this movement is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>87</sup> The introduction to Natalya Lusty's *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2007) offers a very good reading of this tension between Surrealism's simultaneous celebration and exclusion of women, citing Breton's work *Nadja* and the sexualized portraits of many women Surrealists made by Man Ray.

notorious for the objectification and historical exclusion of women, women were involved in Surrealism as witnesses, artists and muses from the beginning of the movement.<sup>88</sup> In her book *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Whitney Chadwick describes the complicated position of women in Surrealism:

No artistic movement since Romanticism has elevated the image of woman to as significant a role in the creative life of man as Surrealism did; no group or movement has ever defined such a revolutionary role for her. And no other movement has had such a large number of active participants, their presence recorded in the poetry and art of male Surrealists, and in the catalogues of the international Surrealist exhibitions of 1935 (Copenhagen and Prague), 1936 (London and New York), 1938 (Paris), 1940 (Mexico City), and 1947 (Paris). Yet the actual role, or roles played by women artists in the Surrealist movement has been more difficult to evaluate, for their own histories have often remained buried under those of male Surrealists who have gained wider public recognition.<sup>89</sup>

As Chadwick notes, the contributions made by female artists to the Surrealist movement have largely been absent from the movement's official recorded history. The legacy of women's involvement has been relegated to muse or object of desire in many iconic Surrealist works. Stern, like many other female Surrealist artists, reconsiders conventional terms of femininity through an emphasis on gender's masquerade and artifice.<sup>90</sup>

In feminist reinterpretations, Surrealism can become a platform from which to question the conventional terms of womanhood. In the book *Mirror Images: Women*,

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<sup>88</sup> "While Surrealism invested its faith in the revolutionary potential of the repressed (male) desire, the role for women was that of agent or sexually liberal muse, not fellow revolutionary. However, several women artists working within the Surrealist movement attempted a displacement rather than a liberation along the lines of sexual iconography: for example, Meret Oppenheim's famous fur-lined teacup, or her fetishistic shoes in bondage, significantly entitled (if we recall the importance of the maid in Freud's case studies) *Ma Gouvernante*, *My Nurse*, *Mein Kindermädchen* (Figure 6.5). In each case the joke, like the fetishized woman, earns its keep by keeping back an awareness of lack." Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, p. 192

<sup>89</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985), p. 7

<sup>90</sup> See for example Joan Rivière's 1929 essay, 'Womanliness as Masquerade'.

*Surrealism and Self-Representation*, Whitney Chadwick describes how the Surrealist movement offered women the possibility to “escape what they perceived as the inhibiting confines of middle-class marriage, domesticity, and motherhood.”<sup>91</sup> This movement’s resistance to the conditions set by culture and middle-class convention inspired artworks that consider femininity a category defined by social and cultural institutions. As Chadwick notes, the works of female Surrealist artists are concerned with “a self-consciousness about social constructions of femininity as surface and image, a tendency toward the phantasmic and oneiric, a preoccupation with psychic powers assigned to the feminine, and an embrace of doubling, masking, and/or masquerade as defense against fears of non-identity.”<sup>92</sup> The *Sueños* share with this feminist Surrealism a treatment of the feminine as artifice or masquerade, and constitutes an example of how the oneiric landscape can be political terrain.

According to Linda Nochlin’s foundational essay, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?’ a break with convention and intervention into the status quo is one of the only options available to women artists.<sup>93</sup> As Nochlin describes, the conditions that go into the creation of a ‘great’ artist are established within this patriarchal institution, so women artists can only achieve the same level of greatness as their male counterparts by intervening in and upsetting the existent status quo. Feminist art is thus defined by its efforts to undermine convention, and frequently does this through the political device of

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<sup>91</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1998), p. 5

<sup>92</sup> Chadwick, *Mirror Images*, p. 6

<sup>93</sup> “In the absence of any thoroughgoing investigation, one can only gather impressionistic data about the presence or absence of rebellion against parental authority in women artists, and whether there may be more or less rebellion on the part of women artists than is true in the case of men. One thing, however, is clear: for a woman to opt for a career at all, much less for a career in art, has required a certain unconventionality, both in the past and at present.” Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?’ p. 31

laughter. Jo Anna Isaak's book *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* considers how laughter serves as a strategy for analyzing feminist art. In this text, feminist art is not intended to be a homogenizing category, but understood as "an agency of intervention—an ongoing activity of pluralizing, destabilizing, baffling any centered discourse."<sup>94</sup> Given this impulse to destabilize and 'baffle' social convention, laughter seems one of many appropriate methods of feminist intervention into the 'centered' discourse of male-dominated art movements.

Isaak offers a useful strategy for understanding how humor serves as a way to deconstruct symbolic and social codes like those articulated and reinforced through gender normativity. She notes, "in providing libidinal gratification, laughter can also provide an analytic for understanding the relationships between the social and the symbolic while allowing us to imagine these relationships differently."<sup>95</sup> In some cases, laughter itself is an analytic process; it allows us to imagine new or different relationships between the 'social and the symbolic', and the codes that go into the construction of behavior, consumption, and various performances of womanhood. Isaak asserts that in his essay *On Humor* "Freud comes very close to delineating a politics strategy for those without access to power: "*Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious.*"<sup>96</sup> Given its rebellious quality, humor can function as a site of empowerment for whoever is laughing. According to this understanding, laughter becomes a strategy for imagining female agency in a misogynistic culture or society.<sup>97</sup> As the following theories of humor show,

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<sup>94</sup> Isaak, p. 4

<sup>95</sup> Isaak, p. 5

<sup>96</sup> Isaak, p. 14

<sup>97</sup> Isaak, citing Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, notes, "in the course of his writing a history of laughter, Bakhtin reveals not just that women have historically been aligned with the popular comic tradition, but

laughter is both liberating and collective, and represents a method of intervention into the accepted, conventional, or normative framework we all live within. The *Sueños* functions politically through humor insofar as it extends an invitation to the readers of *Idilio* to laugh at themselves and the various codes that inform their performance of femininity, thus allowing them to intervene in the constitution of these codes and conventions.

Before we can accept that this series encourages empowerment through laughter, though, the extent to which the *Sueños* photomontages truly result in comedic effect must be established. How funny is an image of a train with the head of a turtle, or a woman ironing her husband's lap? What follows will engage with contemporary theories of humor to argue that this series produces the type of empowering laughter that Isaak describes above. In Noël Carroll's *Humor: A Very Short Introduction*, the author offers an introduction to the major theories of humor and reflects on comedy's political function. This text, as well as Martin Shuster's reflections on Bergson's theory of humor, will illuminate the ways in which Stern's images invite laughter that is expressly female.

In Carroll's *Very Short Introduction*, the author describes five predominant theories of humor: the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, the release theory, the play theory and the dispositional theory. The most widely accepted, which is also the most pertinent to the technique of photomontage, is the incongruity theory. This theory holds that "what is key to comic amusement is a deviation from some presupposed norm—that is to say, an anomaly or an incongruity relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be."<sup>98</sup> Jokes react to and challenge a

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that they have a political stake in this site of insurrection." *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, p. 19

<sup>98</sup> Noël Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 17



common framework that governs acceptable behavior in the world. That which deviates from the norm is always potentially comic, according to the circumstances under which we encounter this deviation. Humor “is primarily a source of social information about the norms that govern the cultures we inhabit—the cultures that are us” because through laughter we confront these given norms.<sup>99</sup> In this way, jokes can be understood as social intervention. Given Surrealism’s emphasis on unsettling or upending convention, it follows that her works share the potential for comedic effect with this definition of the joke.

In Carroll’s text, the author states that typically, Surrealist images are not funny because they work to unsettle the viewer instead of prompting comic amusement. However, I would argue that comedic effect and this unsettling inspired by Surrealist images are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, the comedic effect of many images, narratives, and jokes is closely related to an unsettling effect. In both comedy and Surrealism, the subject is presented to the consumer, audience, or viewer in a strange and alien, but still recognizable, way. As in humor, the subject of Surrealism presents symbols of material reality that are still (sometimes barely) recognizable, but these symbols are altered or exaggerated in vital ways that challenge their familiar significance and connotation. Clearly, not all Surrealist works are humorous, nor are all humorous works Surrealist. However, in producing unsettling or abstract scenes that inspire discomfort, wonder, or confusion in the viewer, the imperative of Surrealist art is parallel to that of humor. The essential divide between Surrealism and humor, however, is the reaction they inspire in the viewer.

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<sup>99</sup> Carroll, p. 76

Comedic effect and Surrealism both represent instances in which a known, familiar, conventional framework is disrupted. In these contexts, ‘framework’ refers to a set of norms that are taken for granted. In both Surrealism and humor, some artistic or descriptive material deviates from convention in a relatively unsettling or surprising way. The resulting effect can range from confusion to aversion to laughter. This reaction is in large part determined by the conditions under which s/he encounters the material in question. In regards to the incongruity theory of humor, Carroll shows how a joke cannot be considered funny unless the audience or recipient of the joke is familiar enough with the framework to recognize a deviation from it. In the case of the *Sueños*, the framework of femininity is the normative structure from which the photomontages deviate. From Rest’s moralizing, patronizing textual analysis to mainstream visual representations of women in popular magazine, the picture of conventional femininity that the *Sueños* parody surrounded this column in the pages of *Idilio*.

When we laugh, we laugh as a member of a group with a shared vocabulary. As Carroll notes, “our converging laughter serves as a signal to each and all of us that we are bound together by shared assumptions.”<sup>100</sup> In order for a joke to have comedic effect, it must be directed at a particular community who are subject to the rules governing the social expectation that is altered, ignored, or disregarded in the joke. In this way, comedy has the potential to forge community and bring people together in their laughter. According to the incongruity theory, humor is always oriented towards a particular community or communal experience that is being laughed at. Similar to the incongruity theory’s emphasis on a foundational, normative framework as a precondition for comedic

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<sup>100</sup> Carroll, p. 76

effect is Bergson's discussion of 'convention.' The language of convention and normativity, again, can be easily applied to the production of Stern's *Sueños*. In these images, the norms that govern women's personal and public lives in Argentina are called into question through the form of the photomontage.

Bergson's theory of humor first proposes that comedians deal not with specific characters but in sweeping generalities. Humor and comedians describe "persons at the point at which they come into contact and become capable of resembling one another."<sup>101</sup> In other words, jokes refer to 'types' of people or characters brought together through their common characteristics. The typical ways in which a certain kind of person behaves, according to the "ready-made elements in [their] personality", results in a joke that illuminates or pokes fun at these "rigidities."<sup>102</sup> Rigidities result when we behave according to habit. As Shuster points out, "the comic consists in bringing these rigidities to the fore."<sup>103</sup> Shuster and Carroll both articulate that one common source of comedic effect is our failure to see the habits that define us:

Humor requires the rigidity that goes with a state of 'autopilot,' namely that the subject of humor has *missed* something about herself...The more we know about the origin of an alleged rigidity, the less it stands out to us *as a rigidity*, and the more it looks like a part of a fluid, unitary whole.<sup>104</sup>

Reality is structured according to preferences and desires that guide and limit our perceptions. Because "our interests and desires serve to screen our experience," we behave according to preferences and structures that guide the particular 'characters' that

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<sup>101</sup> Martin Shuster, 'Humor as an Optics: Bergson and the Ethics of Humor', *Hypatia*, 28 (2013), pp. 618-632.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 621-622.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 624.

we perform.<sup>105</sup> These characters are defined by a fixed set of characteristics, and we act according to certain conventions and develop certain rigidities or excesses (habits) as a result. Like the incongruity theory's description of comedic effect as a potential result of the deviation from a 'governing framework', Bergson's theory of humor argues that comedic effect takes place when certain rigidities that result from our behaving according to convention are pointed out. As Shuster describes, *which* conventions dominate one's character change from moment to moment. However, *some* convention always reigns.<sup>106</sup>

Laughter illuminates the rigidities and social conventions that limit the flexibility of one's character. The second element of Bergson's theory of humor is the notion that humor serves a 'corrective' function and encourages flexibility. A joke reveals the rigidities dominating a personality or behavior at any given time. In this way, laughter serves to correct the imbalance of conventions by illuminating how I am, in any given moment, too fixed or rigid in the roles I perform.<sup>107</sup> Despite this 'corrective' dimension of humor, however, "there is no normative element to Bergson's elaboration of humor: what is or is not humorous is just as contingent as what is or is not the dominant convention(s)."<sup>108</sup> In other words, humor does not correct for, towards, or against any particular convention. In fact, the function of humor is simply to pointing out behavioral or social rigidities, thereby suggesting the potential for change without necessarily defining what form that change might take. Given that contingency prevails in humorous relations and configurations, the joke functions to illuminate the excess of any rigidity

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 620.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 622.

<sup>107</sup> "One perhaps focuses on one convention to the detriment of others, thereby instantiating rigid action. One becomes too much a fire marshal (as in Jim Carrey's famous character on *In Living Color*) or too little a rational agent (as in various varieties of slapstick). Amusement is the recognition, social in nature, of this occurrence, and laughter its result." Shuster, p. 622.

<sup>108</sup> Shuster, p. 623

formed according to convention; the positions of comedian and the butt of the joke are easily reversed from moment to moment. In this way, comedic effect offers a way out of convention without delineating a specific alternative to the rigidities that convention forms. Simply, the joke signals potential alternatives to the framework of convention.

The final defining element of Bergson's theory is the proposal that "humor requires a sort of detachment" in order to function.<sup>109</sup> In other words, if we are 'too close' to the subject or person being laughed at, we are unlikely to find a joke funny. As Shuster puts it, "emotional investment precludes, or, at the very least, makes difficult the mechanization required" to find a situation humorous. However, when we "look upon life as a disinterested spectator, many a drama will turn into a comedy."<sup>110</sup> Events or activities observed impartially, with distance from the emotional context surrounding them are far more potentially humorous. The detachment required for a joke to have comedic effect signals that the positions of observer and observed are inherent in the joke's configuration. Occupying the position of an objective, detached observer is a precondition for finding the humor in a state of events or subject.

The rigidities of convention become apparent (and humorous) when encountered from a distance. If we are implicated or involved in the conventions presented in an image or a joke, "things that may otherwise look like rigidities begin to look like aspects of a whole and do not 'stand out' anymore."<sup>111</sup> Detachment and deviation from a framework of understanding is central to the viewer's experience of the photomontage. In presenting a visual record of the process of fragmentation, this technique detaches the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 632

<sup>110</sup> Bergson quoted in Shuster, p. 623

<sup>111</sup> Shuster, p. 624

viewer from the codes and symbols presumed to communicate a transparent and coherent meaning. As the first chapter of this thesis describes, the photomontage fragments the image, thereby scrambling its original coherence or meaning. In composing the photomontage, visual symbols or codes that reinforce certain conventions are taken out of their context and reconfigured. The viewer encounters individual parts of an image and must work to recognize or assemble coherent meaning out of these parts.

In the column ‘El psicoanálisis le ayudará’, the process of dream interpretation and analysis (typically an intimate encounter between analyst and patient) is published for the consumption of strangers, albeit strangers who all share in a knowledge of the codes and conventions under consideration. The humor in the *Sueños* is made possible because the dreamer appears in this column as anonymous examples of the conventions that the readers of *Idilio* are intimately familiar with, kept at a distance by the quasi-fictional format of this column. The dreamers’ own account of her dream are never published, but only referred to or summarized by Richard Rest. Stern’s images, as well, abstract the reality of the case at hand. The female subject of the photomontages was almost always ‘played’ by Stern’s daughter Silvia dressed up in different outfits or pictured in different environments.<sup>112</sup> The artifice and theatricality of the *Sueños* series distance its readers from the real psychological and personal stakes of the dream in question.

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<sup>112</sup> The models for the *Sueños* series were “personas de la familia, amigos y vecinos; en especial su hija Silvia...Todo se hacía en casa. El vestuario y la escenografía también eran domésticos, y la fuente de imágenes fotográficas complementarias era el propio archivo de Grete” [members of the family, friends and neighbors; especially [Stern’s] daughter Silvia...It was all done at home. The wardrobe and the stages were domestic and the source photographs were all taken from Grete’s own archive]. Luis Priamo, ‘Notas sobre los *Sueños* de Grete Stern’ in *Sueños: fotomontajes de Grete Stern (serie completa)* ed. by Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 18

With these two theories of humor (the incongruity theory and Bergson's theory of humor), the political function of laughter in Stern's *Sueños* can be articulated. The role of convention or normative framework defines a collective that can laugh together at the rigidities they enact. This can explain Stern's portrayal of conventional elements in her photomontages—in this way these scenes are rendered abstract but intimately familiar. The political force of the comedic effect of these photomontages is largely dependent on the establishment of a community of readers who share a familiarity with the framework of femininity. As Paula Bertúa points out, in these images “las figuras de mujer no sólo re-presentan modelos sociales reales, sino que también, como construcciones, postulan ideales y elaboran mitologías que se hacen eco de las expectativas de las lectoras” [the female subject does not just re-produce real social models as fabrications but also proposes ideals and extends mythologies that echo the expectations of the readership].<sup>113</sup> Dreamers are pictured in traditional, feminine and modest clothing, engaged in activities such as dancing or shopping, or contained in comfortable and ornate living rooms and surrounded by modern household appliances. The readership of this column was brought together in their familiarity with the symbols and codes contained within these photomontages. In this way, readers were at once invited to identify with and observe from a distance the framework of conventional femininity interpreted by Stern.

The image of a young woman reaching for her lover in window above her, oblivious to the net that falls over her will speak differently to an elderly man, for example, than it would to a young woman who sees herself or her peers in the protagonist of this image. A smirking man pictured with two different women in each lens of his

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<sup>113</sup> Paula Bertúa, ‘Sueños de *Idilio*’, p. 13

sunglasses and a cigarette balanced on his lip elicits a particular response when encountered by the young, female readership of *Idilio*. The conventions that Stern's photomontages reveal articulate a community united through laughter and familiarity with certain codes of femininity. Because the 'corrective' function of humor is not normative or disciplinary, the kind of laughter that these images inspire is not one of malice. Stern's images are funny because of the ways in which they simultaneously reproduce and deviate from the expectations held by the readership of *Idilio*. By picturing characters and conventions that the readers of this column identify with, these images both appeal to a certain community and, through the fragmentation staged by the photomontage, deconstruct the rigidities or conventions that restrict this community. The central placement of the female subject and the readers' direct involvement in the production of these images (the images depict *their* dreams) point to a communal experience, inviting the viewer to see herself as subject to but empowered to change the codes revealed in these photomontages as abstract and arbitrary.

### **Conclusion**

The photograph's supposed claim to reality lends this visual medium an authority of alleged truth. Due to this authority, photographic representation of the behavior, dress, and attitude of women contained in the pages of a popular magazine influence and maintain the status quo that dictates terms of femininity and female-ness. The advertisements or fictional 'fotonovelas' published in *Idilio* claim to offer a picture of potential reality despite their clearly staged, narrative quality. Photomontage exposes the



fabrication behind these photographic ‘realities’. This technique interrupts and complicates the transparency of the symbols or attitudes presented as ‘true’ in the photograph. In the process of constructing the photomontage, the meaning of an image fractures and multiplies. A photograph of a smiling woman wearing a beautiful dress might promise happiness in the form of the possession of that particular dress. A photomontage of the exact same image, however, portrays the direct association of happiness with the dress as superficial, depicting the scene as fabricated or staged and thus revealing how the meaning of the photograph is skewed for commercial and ideological purposes.

The dreams depicted in the *Sueños* photomontages “no son sueños individuales sino colectivos: de clase y de género” [are not individual but collective: of class and gender].<sup>114</sup> In Stern’s serial illustrations of women’s dreams, patterns emerge that speak to the conditions of conventional femininity that shape both the waking life and dreams of women. Richard Rest’s analysis and the larger context of *Idilio* exemplify and reinforce these conventions. Through the form of photomontage, Stern subtly subverts and calls attention to the rigidities of this conventional framework. This series reveals the extent to which the dreams and psychic life of the readership of this magazine were saturated in the type of femininity propagated by publications like *Idilio* and disciplinary voices like that of Richard Rest.

Comedic effect depends upon the following conditions: rigidities formed by a framework or convention, emotional distance from the subject at hand, and a familiarity with the vocabulary or social codes interrogated by the joke. The comedic effect of the

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<sup>114</sup> Paula Bertúa, ‘Sueños de *Idilio*’, p. 13

*Sueños* series is evident when considering these conditions and the circumstances of this series' circulation. The superficial, dry tone of Rest's analysis is highlighted in contrast to Stern's photomontages that illustrate bizarre and dramatic circumstances surrounding the conventions of femininity. Stern's inclusion of typical dress and identifiably middle class activities or environments brings together abstract, grotesque oneiric content with the 'norms' that govern the performance of femininity. When considering the series of *Sueños* photomontages as a whole, the sense of humor that comes through illuminates the rigidities of (gendered) convention by inserting abstract incongruities into an otherwise seamless picture of womanhood. Though Stern never explicitly articulated the function of humor in this series, her photomontages consistently critiqued the place of woman in society through parody, calling attention to the rigidity of convention. The political force of the *Sueños* series depends upon this critical and collectivizing power of laughter. Laughter, as Jo Anna Isaak and Martin Shuster have pointed out, constitutes an analytic method for understanding the relationship between the social and the symbolic. In the legacy of feminist art, laughter has proven essential to women's intervention into a world from which they have historically been excluded.

The *Sueños* exemplify a hugely productive example of feminist intervention into popular visual culture and the work of Grete Stern is a significant contribution to the history of Surrealist feminist art. Because the photomontage exposes the process by which certain codes and symbols construct meaning, the medium functions to reveal the rigidities found in the pages of a popular magazine, for example, that reinforces an idealized image of femininity. Through laughter, communities are articulated and political and social relationships can be reimaged. The genius of the *Sueños* series lies

in the precise type of laughter it inspires. By inviting the dreamers and readers of *Idilio* to become aware of the limited conventional femininity propagated by commercial, political, and ideological institutions, this series enables women to imagine alternatives to the rigid performance of femininity, together and through their shared laughter.

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## Appendix

1. Questionnaire, 'El psicoanálisis te ayudará': "Queremos ayudarle a conocerse a sí misma, a fortalecer su alma, a resolver sus problemas, a responder a sus dudas, a vencer sus complejos, y a superarse. Conteste usted a todas las preguntas que le formulamos aquí; escriba con toda espontaneidad, no se preocupe por la forma literaria ni por las palabras que emplee, exprese simple y sinceramente todo lo que piensa y todo lo que siente. 1: Cuéntenos sus más antiguos recuerdos infantiles. 2: ¿Tuvo usted una infancia feliz? 3: ¿Cómo eran sus padres para con usted y usted para con ellos? 4: ¿Y con sus hermanos? 5: ¿Cuáles eran sus más ardientes deseos cuando niña? 6: ¿Qué aspiraba ser cuando grande? 7: ¿De qué se ocupa actualmente? 8: ¿Está satisfecha con su trabajo? 9: ¿Cuáles son sus diversiones? 10: ¿Tiene muchas amistades? 11: ¿Se lleva bien con ellas, con su familia? 12: ¿Qué desea que los demás piensen de usted? 13: ¿Le preocupa mucho su opinión? 14: ¿Qué piensa usted de sí misma? 15: Cuando durante el día o la noche se abandona a fantasear, ¿cual es el tema favorito? 16: ¿Fantasea usted a menudo? 17: ¿Qué es lo más importante que le ha ocurrido en la vida? 18: ¿Cuál es el recuerdo más hermoso? 19: ¿Y el más feo? 20: ¿Piensa a menudo en la muerte? 21: ¿Le parece que el destino es adverso? 22: ¿Que ha fracasado en la vida? 23: ¿O que va a fracasar? 24: ¿Qué piensa usted del amor? 25: ¿Sueña mucho? 26: ¿Hay algún tema que se repite con mucha frecuencia? 27: ¿Cual es? 28: ¿Cuáles son los problemas que le preocupan actualmente? 29: ¿Relátenos ahora el sueño que más le han impresionado y el último que recuerde haber soñado. Escribir a "Sección Psicoanálisis", Redacción de IDILIO, Piedras 113.
2. Richard Rest's introduction to psychoanalysis: "La felicidad en el amor, el éxito en el trabajo, la alegría y el afecto en la familia y en la amistad, es decir el fracaso o el éxito en la vida dependen sobre todo de nosotros mismos, de nuestro carácter. ¿Acaso

no sabemos que no es necesario ser hermosa para triunfar en el amor? ¿Que aun personas sólo mediocrementemente dotadas pueden alcanzar grandes éxitos? Y, por el contrario, ¿no vemos ser felices a mujeres jóvenes y bellas, a quienes parecería destinada una vida plena de felicidad y de alegría? En verdad, hay circunstancias que nos son adversas, pero, ¿cuántas veces confundimos el destino con algo que está en nosotros mismos—pensamientos, sentimientos--, de lo que no nos damos cuenta y que sin embargo nos impulsan a pensar, sentir, y obrar de determinado modo? El psicoanálisis nos brinda el camino para conocernos a nosotros mismos, para descubrir la realidad. En esta sección queremos poner a sus alcances, en la medida en que lo permita el medio empleado, la ayuda que el psicoanálisis puede proporcionarle para resolver sus problemas. En este y en los números sucesivos publicaremos las contestaciones al cuestionario que aquí se publica, y en algunos casos contestaremos directamente. Invitamos pues a todos los lectores y lectoras a escribirnos sin miedo, sin vacilaciones, pues sólo encontrarán humana comprensión y leal ayuda. – Prof. RICHARD REST”

3. Los sueños de fotografía (86): “En los sueños de fotografía, el retrato o el espejo significan el deseo del soñador de hacerse una idea o imagen de sí mismo, o de que otros se la hagan de uno. Tal significado está asociado, naturalmente, con lo que vulgarmente se llama la fidelidad del ojo fotográfico, etc. Pues bien, vemos aquí una joven que se espanta ante un hombre que la mira con un “ojo fotográfico”. El significado es evidente: teme ella que la conozcan en su verdadera personalidad. Es verdad que todos mentimos un poco, que la personalidad que mostramos en nuestras relaciones sociales no es idéntica a nuestra personalidad más profunda y genuina; pero es forzoso que así sea, pues la vida misma lo impone. En cambio, cuando nuestra personalidad social difiere completamente de la verdadera, comienzan las dificultades. Tal es lo que pasa con la joven que tuvo el sueño aquí ilustrado. Había mentido tanto con respeto a sí misma, habíase mostrado, con el fin de atraerlo, tan diferente de lo que en realidad era, al joven que le interesaba, que ahora se aterroriza ante la idea de que éste la vea como en verdad es, descubriendo—definitivamente—toda la superchería.”

4. Los sueños de conflictos matrimoniales (93): “Es indudable que las tareas domésticas poseen, aparte de su importancia práctica para toda ama de casa, un significado más profundo. Cabe considerarlas como un símbolo de la vida hogareña y de la tranquilidad y la paz de la existencia familiar. Vemos aquí a una mujer que está planchando a un hombre, su marido. Ahora bien, ¿Qué significa planchar? A grandes rasgos, es alisar una cosa, quitar las arrugas o asperezas, dejarla en las condiciones necesarias para que se la pueda utilizar con comodidad. Pues bien, tal era lo que la joven esposa, que vemos aquí representada, quería hacer con su marido. Llevaban poco tiempo de casados y aún no se había creado entre ellos ese mutuo entendimiento y acomodación de caracteres necesarios en todos matrimonios. Había asperezas entre ellos, y son precisamente éstas las que la esposa le quiere quitar. Por lo tanto, el sueño refleja patentemente su presente situación. Procura la mujer hacer a su marido más liso, con el fin de que su vida familiar pueda marchar sin trabas. Y el pensamiento onírico configura en imágenes tal situación.
5. Los sueños de celos (96): “Éste es un sueño de una joven celosa, celosa en exceso. Sus celos ya no pertenecen a aquellos que pueden considerarse como derivados de un gran cariño, sino que entran en la categoría de los que más bien constituyen una manifestación de egoísmo desmesurado que en realidad muy poco tiene que ver con el amor. Esta joven torturaba constantemente a su novio con escenas de celos verdaderamente intolerables. Hasta había llegado a decirle que el hecho de que él mirara simplemente a una mujer por la calle provocaría su ruptura. Su sueño le reveló lo ridículo e insensato de su conducta. Vemos en él a su novio, llevando unos anteojos sumamente interesantes: en cada uno de los vidrios de éstos hay una chica encantadora. El sentido es claro. ‘Eres una tonta—le dice el sueño--, por más que te esfuerces en querer a tu novio para ti sola, nunca lo conseguirás de esa manera. Haces todo lo contrario de lo que una mujer sensata debe hacer, y sólo lograrás que él adopte una conducta tan insensata como la tuya. El hecho de que tú te muestres tan celosa, de que cada paso sospeches que a tu novio se le presentan tentaciones, sólo quiere decir que eres tú que las sientes. Sigue de esta manera y lo único que conseguirás es que este hombre, al cual crees amar o que tal vez ames de verdad, se aparte de ti. A través de esos anteojos que tú le quieres poner para que te veas sólo a



ti, comenzará a ver todas aquellas imágenes que tú supones que ve, y con pésimas consecuencias para ti.”

6. Los sueños de trenes (40): “Los sueños relacionados con viajar, con vías, trenes y ferrocarriles, son muy frecuentes. El tren puede aparecer bajo distintas formas en las imágenes oníricas y adquirir, por lo tanto, múltiples significados, pero casi nunca deja de referirse a lo que podríamos llamar ‘el viaje de la vida’. En este sueño el tren aparece con el carácter de monstruo amenazador que muy a menudo asume en la niñez. Y, hecho singular, surge del mar, símbolo universal del inconsciente. Trátase pues de una fuerza que se halla contenida en él y cuya presencia la soñadora experimenta con terror, como una amenaza. Es decir, frente a la energía psíquica simbolizada por el tren (elemento dinámico) que brota del inconsciente, la mujer (ya adulta) tiene una actitud de miedo infantil. Tal es el significado del sueño, que contiene en verdad una clara advertencia, pues indicia la necesidad de que la protagonista asuma frente a sus propios impulsos la actitud adulta que corresponde a su estado y ubicación anímicos en la vida real.”
7. Los sueños de muñecos (39): “El muñeco es algo inanimado que, sin embargo, quiere representar la vida. En otro sentido, podríamos decir que aspira a adquirirla. Y, a menudo, tal es el significado que debe atribuírsele en la interpretación de los sueños. En el que comentamos, la soñadora se ve enfrentada por un muñeco que representa un niño, siente que no quiere verlo, pero sin embargo es atraída por él. La imagen onírica del muñeco representa aquí un contenido inconsciente de su psique, una parte de su personalidad, a la que, en su vida real, la soñadora no ha prestado atención, o acaso ha despreciado dejándola inactiva y como cosa inanimada. Ahora se le enfrenta y reclama, justamente, vida. Al dársela, la soñadora, ensanchará su personalidad, adquirirá algo valioso, que ha de contribuir de esta manera a la plenitud de su vida.”
8. Los sueños de persecución (46): “Los sueños de persecución se cuentan entre los más comunes. Justamente por ello no puede atribuírseles una significación general, sino que deben ser interpretados cada uno dentro del contexto de la personalidad y las circunstancias vitales de la protagonista. En este caso la soñadora se vio perseguida por las miradas frías y despiadadas de unos ojos misteriosamente aparecidos alrededor de ella. ‘Huí presa de angustia’, contó luego la protagonista, ‘en una

interminable fuga, tratando desesperadamente de esconderme antes esas miradas'. Es evidente que este sueño indica la presencia de un fuerte complejo de culpabilidad en el inconsciente de la soñadora. Ese miedo de llegar a ser descubierta en algo que nadie debe saber representaba, en efecto, la actitud fundamental de toda su vida real. Por supuesto no era una actitud de la que se daba cuenta; pero igualmente, desde lo más profundo de su psique, influía de manera insospechada en todos los actos conscientes.”

9. Los sueños de ambición (79): “La vida que vivimos, el ambiente en que nos movemos, nuestras amistades, nuestras tareas, en suma, todas aquellas que en conjunto forman nuestra atmósfera vital, suelen en ocasiones tornárenos insoportables. Por lo general, no sabemos entonces el porqué y ignoramos las razones precisas de ese malestar difuso que se infiltra en nuestra existencia y enturbia con matices de tristeza y tedio todas nuestras acciones. Se debe ello a que no nos hallamos satisfechos. Aspiramos a más de cuanto la vida nos ha deparado. Nos sentimos superiores, más grandes de lo que tenemos, y ambicionamos más. El sueño aquí ilustrado representa de manera muy clara esta situación. La soñadora ha crecido, es decir, ha evolucionado espiritualmente. Su vida actual—simbolizada por su habitación—ya le queda chica. Sus ambiciones, sus anhelos, tienden mucho más allá. ¿Logrará realizar lo que desea? Es muy probable que sí, pues las imágenes del sueño son claras y no aparece en él ningún símbolo que contradiga su sentido. Todo depende, en casos como éste, de la propia soñadora. Si ella se lo propusiese, lograría convertir en realidad sus sueños.”
10. Los sueños de reminiscencias (22): “La casa, propia o ajena, es un elemento muy común en los sueños. A menudo ella simboliza la propia persona del soñador, a veces se refiere, en cambio, a la de otros. En muchos casos se la considera un símbolo típico femenino. En este sueño, la soñadora vio la casa de su adolescencia—extrañamente transfigurada—y en ella a una joven a quien la vinculaban desde largo tiempo lazos de afecto y amistad. Una vez más hallamos aquí cómo el inconsciente revela el verdadero significado de una relación; el sueño indica claramente que esa relación amistosa no era tal y debía situarse en plano del amor. Pero la soñadora no había advertido todo eso. Ella se ve en el sueño, bailando frente a la casa de la

adolescencia—una casa sin puertas y desde cuya única ventana la llama el joven amigo—. Toda la escena parece significar: “Debes volver a tus años de juventud, y puedes lograrlo sólo a través del llamado de tu amigo, a quien amas.”

11. Los sueños de encarcelamiento (47): “Los sueños pueden dividirse en dos clases muy amplias. Una estaría formada por aquellos que se refieren a situaciones y problemas actuales de la persona. La otra la integrarían los de significado más general, que ya no se refieren a un suceso externo o interno de la existencia, sino que simbolizan la conducta total o, mejor dicho, la posición de la persona con respecto a las más importantes cuestiones de la vida. El sueño que aquí ilustramos es de estos últimos. La soñadora aparece encerrada en una jaula. Pero no sólo en sus sueños era prisionera, sino también en la vida cotidiana. Gran cantidad de falsos prejuicios le impedían la libre y franca manifestación de su ser, convirtiéndola en una persona tímida y carente de iniciativa. El sueño le muestra un retrato fiel de su existencia. Con ello, el inconsciente pretende señalarle la inutilidad de su vida y la urente necesidad de modificar su juicio respecto de una cantidad de cuestiones de capital importancia. Era preciso, entonces, romper los barrotes de la cárcel de los falsos prejuicios.”